

HOME LIFE  
IN FRANCE  
MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS

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JR Ellis Roberts.



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# HOME LIFE IN FRANCE

“Chaque Française travaille pour l'avenir et accumule pour la postérité, retranchant méthodiquement sur son bien-être et sur son plaisir, ce qu'il faut pour le bien-être des générations futures et les héritiers qu'il ne connaîtra pas.”—M. GABRIEL HANOTAUX (“ Le France Contemporaine ”).





MARRIAGE

# HOME LIFE IN FRANCE

BY

MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE DE FRANCE

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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A UN AMI FRANÇAIS  
CE LIVRE EST DÉDIÉ

M. B.-E.

SOME of these papers have appeared in the *Cornhill* and other Magazines, to the Editors and Proprietors of which I here make due acknowledgment. My best thanks are also due to the numerous French friends who have helped me in the matter of facts and figures, and to the artists who have so graciously lent photographs of their works.



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# HOME LIFE IN FRANCE

## CHAPTER I

### SOCIAL USAGES

THE first turning of a French door-handle is symbolic. Just as we lower the knob to the left, our neighbours raise it to the right, so we may safely take it for granted that everything done across the water is performed after a fashion directly contrary to our own. Domestic arrangements, social usages, rules of etiquette are pleasantly criss-cross, divertingly unfamiliar, neither more nor less than antipodal. Twenty-four hours spent under a French roof may be described as a perpetual process of dishabituating. The merest bagatelle is invested with novelty. Unaccustomed ways and surroundings make it difficult to believe that French and English are separated by an hour's sea journey only ; that in clear weather France and England contemplate each other face to face. Nor on further acquaintance does this impression vanish. Many of our countrymen, like the late Mr. Hamerton, have made France their home. But in their case it is dissimilarity that fascinates. In the very least like the home left behind, a French fireside can never be.

Let us begin with the guest-chamber of a well-appointed house. Our first notion is that a bed has just been put into a boudoir or drawing-room for our accommodation. Not a single object suggests a room in which we

not only sleep, but go through the various processes of the toilette. We soon discover that one handsome piece of furniture, as closely shut as a piano with the lid down, is a washstand ; another, equally delusive at first sight, is a dressing-table ; or, maybe, a panel reveals a tiny dressing-closet, the said panel never under any circumstances whatever being allowed to remain open during the day.

Most things in France have a historic explanation, and the fashion of receiving visitors in one's bedroom was set by royalty. Sully describes how one morning Henri Quatre waked up his "dormouse"—the snoring Marie de Medici—by his side, in order that she might hear what the minister had to say. The Sun-King allowed himself farther licence, and held solemn audiences in his *garde-robe*. Versailles, vast as it was, had no space for private salons ; courtiers of both sexes could only be at home to visitors in their bedrooms.

The habit has not wholly died out. I have at different times spent many weeks with old-fashioned folk living near Dijon, the household consisting of three families living under one roof. On the first chilly day a fire would be lighted in the grandmother's bedroom, and thither we all adjourned for a chat or a game of whist. If neighbours dropped in, no apology was offered for receiving them thus unceremoniously.

Another custom handed down from generation to generation is that of employing men in housework. In private interiors, as well as in hotels, men often supply the place of housemaids, at any rate up to a certain point. They sweep the rooms, polish the floors, and brush velvet-covered furniture. In Balzac's works, these domestics are often mentioned. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries *valets de chambre* not only acted the part of housemaids, but of ladies' maids ; they arranged their mistress's head-dress and hair, and aided her in the adjustment of hoops and *fallalas* or flounces. Perhaps the fact of Frenchwomen



in former days always being dressed, never dressing themselves, accounts for the indifference to the looking-glass.

It has ever been a standing marvel to me that our sisters over the water have their bonnets straight and their coiffure irreproachable. In the matter of mirrors they are worse off than Pompeiian ladies with their metal substitutes. A French sleeping apartment abounds in reflectors ; never by any chance can you see yourself properly. A looking-glass invariably surmounts the mantelpiece, but so obscured by ornamental timepiece and branched candelabra as to be absolutely unavailable. There will be looking-glasses here, looking-glasses there ; for one that answers the purpose for which it was intended you seek in vain. With regard to downiness, elasticity, and cleanliness the French bed is unsurpassed, every year or every two years the mattresses being opened, picked over, and aired. The only drawback is height, a bed being often as difficult to get at as the upper berth of a ship's cabin.

In a French house no prevailing savour of fried bacon between eight and nine o'clock a.m. announces the family breakfast. Your tea or coffee and roll are served whilst you still luxuriate on your pillows. Rousseau pronounced the English breakfast to be the most charming custom he found here. The French habit has much to recommend it. Our hosts are left to themselves, and our own day is begun without effort or fatigue. A French home, moreover, is seldom adapted for a house party. The cosy morning room, the library, and smoking-room are only found in palatial dwellings. What would a lady do, for example, with three or four visitors in a Parisian flat ?

The next experience of a French household is its extreme animation—with apologies to my friends—I will say noisiness. An English band of housemaids is mouse-like in its movements. Passages are swept and dusted, breakfast-room, schoolroom, servants' hall are prepared for the morning meal in almost unbroken silence. No sooner

are shutters thrown open in France than a dozen sounds announce the resumption of work, the return to daily life. Men and maids laugh, talk, or dispute at the top of their voices ; master and mistress shout orders ; children make a playroom of corridors. The general effervescence might lead a modern Voltaire's Ingénu, or the counterpart of Montesquieu's Persian, to suppose that in France taciturnity is heavily taxed.

The prevailing quietness of an English interior equally surprises a French new-comer. The late Alphonse Daudet resented such tranquillity. To an interviewer he unflatteringly compared the silent, reserved London home with the life of a Parisian flat : from an open window a piano heard there ; from an open door voices heard here ; folk chattering on the stairs ; not a storey without animation and movement. On the other hand, some of our neighbours fall in love with our own domestic quietude and seclusion only the family circle housed under a single roof ; no inquisitorial *conciierge* watching one's going out and coming in ; last, but not least, no servants shut out at night, sleeping in attics perhaps three or four storeys above that of their employers.

Drawing-rooms differ from our own no less than bedrooms. In France furniture, as well as laws, customs, and social ordinances, has closely followed tradition. A Parisian salon still recalls the stilted seventeenth century, the remorselessly formal epoch of Madame de Sévigné. Under the next reign slight modifications were introduced. The straight-backed, ironically-called *fauteuil* or easy-chair of Louis XIV., upright, solemn, and uncomfortable as a throne, was replaced by an armchair with cushions, and of more reposeful make. The *fauteuil Voltaire* was a further improvement. Sofas, settees, footstools followed suit ; but French upholstery still sacrifices ease to elegance. The comparison of Maple's showroom in the Boulevard de la Madeleine with that of a Parisian rival shows the difference.

Then, arrangement is different. French visitors in England are surprised at what, for want of a better word, I will call the "at-homeness" of our own drawing-rooms—in one corner the mistress's writing-table, in another a case of favourite books ; on the table, library volumes, reviews, and newspapers ; music on the open piano, doggie's basket by the fireplace, a low chair or two for the children ; on all sides evidence of perpetual occupation.

A French salon must not so unbend ; domesticities within such precincts would be held out of place. A semi-circle of elegant elbow chairs, or *bergères*, face the high-backed sofa, on which sits the lady of the house when at home to friends. Rugs sparsely break the expanse of polished floor ; consoles, brackets, and cabinets impart a museum-like aspect. The French salon—of course, with exceptions—however much it may dazzle the eye, does not warm the heart.

The dining-room calls for no comment, but table arrangements offer novelty. Except in homely, old-fashioned, and modest households dishes at the twelve-o'clock *déjeuner*, now often called lunch, are invariably carved by the servants and handed round. The free-and-easy etiquette of an English family luncheon has not as yet been followed. One peculiarity of non-official French meals is the rule regarding wine. It is never the butler or footman, always the host and hostess or a lady's table companion, who offer wine, a decanter being placed by every alternate cover. The custom doubtless arises from the habit, now fallen into complete disuse, of toasting one's next-door neighbour. The position of glass or glasses is another important point. These are always placed immediately in front of your plate ; never at the right hand, as with ourselves. A friendly hostess explained to me that this position is a precaution against accidents ; but as dishes are always served on the left side, I do not quite see the force of her argument.

A luncheon party, or formal *déjeuner*, is a much more protracted and formal affair than on our side of the water. Coffee having been served, the company return to the drawing-room, but not to chat for five minutes and disperse, as with us. The men disappear for the enjoyment of cigarettes; the ladies indulge in what is called a *causerie intime*, or talk of business, children, and family affairs. French ladies, be it recalled by the way, never smoke. The habit is entirely left to the Bohemian and the unclassed. The early *déjeuner* hastens on the hour of calls. Visits, alike ceremonial and friendly, are generally made between one and two o'clock. The late M. Cherbuliez, with whose warm friendship I was honoured, always chose that time for his long delightful chats.

Afternoon tea, as I have already mentioned, is rather made an excuse for social reunion than regarded in the light of a habit or necessity. Most often friends invite each other to one of the numerous "five o'clocks," now a feature of Parisian hotels. The children's *goûter*, or lunch of bread and chocolate, is eaten here, there, and everywhere. Two meals, and two meals only, have French cooks to trouble their heads about during the twenty-four hours. And here I would observe that, although among English-speaking cosmopolitan French people the second *déjeuner* is often called lunch, ordinarily the term designates the light and elegant repast taken later in the day—at two or three o'clock, for example, in the case of weddings, at four or five in that of garden parties. Tea is now appearing at *le lunch de l'après midi*. In country houses informal refreshments are taken out-of-doors, upon such occasions young ladies not disdaining beer with their *brioche*, or light sweetened bread; there tea is very seldom made.

We now come to the all-important subject of dinner. Here etiquette is exceedingly precise. Dr. Johnson would never have had to complain in France that somebody's dinner was all very well, but "not a dinner to invite a



man to." Critical of the critical, and in no matter more so than in that of gastronomy, French hosts will always make quite sure that their dinner is worth inviting a man to.

I well remember a *déjeuner* to which I was invited some years since by an ex-Minister of Public Instruction and his wife, only one other guest and two or three members of the family making up the party. My fellow-guest was a Russian, my hosts were Lorrainers, and, as a delicate compliment, the three principal dishes—fresh-water fish, venison, and *galettes* (a kind of pancake)—were all local dainties, and all exquisitely cooked after local fashion. Such little attentions lend a grace and charm altogether unpurchasable to any banquet. The invitatory compliment is thereby doubled. By offering you the choicest products of his especial corner of France, your host seems to entertain in a double capacity—to represent his province as well as his household.

I will now say something about etiquette. In a civilization so ancient and so elaborate as that of France the cult of manners would naturally hold a prominent place. So far back as 1675 social usages were inculcated in a manual by Antoine de Courtin, "*Traité de la Civilité qui se pratique en France, parmi les honnêtes gens.*" Three-quarters of a century later appeared another work on good manners, "*Civilité puérile et honnête, par un missionnaire,*" more especially adapted to the young ; and from that date numerous works of the kind have been issued.

One curious feature of French etiquette is the direct opposition of many rules to our own, in every case the divergence being explicable. With ourselves an introduction entitles a lady to acknowledge or not as she pleases a presentee of the other sex. Precisely an opposite rule holds good in France ; here, as in so many other instances, custom following tradition. Louis XIV. never encountered a washerwoman or chambermaid without raising his hat.

An Englishman respectfully salutes a lady of his acquaintance. A Frenchman, following the example of the Roi Soleil, pays indiscriminate homage to the sex ; he would never dream of addressing a shop assistant or a *concierge* without such a salute. Under no circumstance whatever must a lady in France take the initiative ; it is for a man to proclaim himself her leal servitor, for her to accept his obeisance. An introduction in a friendly drawing-room authorizes—indeed, obliges—a gentleman to acquaint himself with the lady's day and hour of reception, and then to present himself.

Tradition may also be traced in the etiquette of calls. In England, whenever new-comers settle in a country town or village, it is for residents to leave cards or not as they please. In France the case is different ; with new-comers rests the option of proffering intercourse. The purchaser of a *château* or villa is not called upon by his neighbours ; he calls upon those whose acquaintance he wishes to cultivate. I think the reversal of our own rule may be explained in this way. What is called villadom in England is a world that has sprung up outside the close ring of ancestral manors. With the French *campagne* or country house it is otherwise. As M. Rambaud has pointed out (" Histoire de la Civilization Francaise"), it was in the seventeenth century that Parisians, following royal fashion, began to build elegant retreats for the *villégiature*. These new residents in country places belonging to the same class as the old, there would naturally be no scruple about making acquaintances. A minor matter shows the hold of tradition upon French etiquette. It strikes us oddly to receive letters signed " Bien affectueusement à vous, Comtesse de R—— " (" Very affectionately yours, Countess of R—— ") ; or, " Votre bien dévoué, Marquis de X—— " (" Yours very sincerely, Marquis of X—— "). But the usage is historic. Thus great ladies and gentlemen of the seventeenth century inscribed themselves when writing to friends.

Many other instances might be cited. Customs which to English notions appear artificial, even ridiculous, look quite differently when studied from the standpoint of laws, institutions, and religion.

The long and elaborate formula with which letters are wound up afford an example. Instead of "Yours faithfully" or "Yours truly," we find a circumlocution as follows: "Be so good as to permit me to express the assurance of my most sincere devotion and respect." But the habit is merely a survival of exaggerated court etiquette, and the long string of compliments in which English critics discern French insincerity has no kind of meaning whatever. The same may be averred of many set phrases, well-worn locutions that suited the artificial times in which they were framed, but are incongruous on modern lips. In what is called society, that is to say, the circumscribed area still wedded to tradition, the *thee* and *thou* of familiar intercourse is discarded in public. The middle and upper middle ranks, on the contrary, still adhere to the pretty quakerish fashion. Among lifelong friends of both sexes, too, the *vous* is discarded for the more intimately affectionate *tu* and *toi*. There is no hard and fast rule. In some country places you will even hear peasant children address their parents by the more formal second person plural, a usage which has survived the "sir" and "madam" of our Georgian epoch, and probably originating in the autocratic nature of parental rule. The use of the third person singular by domestics and subordinates is another survival of the *ancien régime* and caste.

A French maid does not say, "When would you like your bath, ma'am?" but "Madame, when would she like her bath?" "Madame, does she intend to wear this?" "Monsieur, will he take this?" and so on and so on, the *vous* being studiously omitted.

On this subject I append a good story. When wintering in Brittany many years ago, a French friend, whilst

engaging a young nursemaid, informed her that she must always address her in the third person singular. The damsel heard in silence, but on going to the kitchen blurted out to the cook, her future fellow-servant, "What in the world does madame mean? The third person singular! I know no more what she is driving at than a new-born baby. M. le Curé has often spoken to me of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but of the third person singular, never." In those days Brittany was the least-instructed province of France. Such ignorance could not anywhere be matched at the present time.

One curious Parisian institution is the ambulatory bath. I was staying with French acquaintances in the Avenue Villiers, when one afternoon I heard a tremendous lumbering on the front staircase, such a clatter and commotion, indeed, that I opened my door in alarm. "It is only madame's bath," said the maid-of-all-work, smiling as she threw wide the outer door. Straightway was wheeled inside an enormous bath, attendants following with cans of water and heating apparatus. A quarter of an hour later my hostess was enjoying the long drawn out luxury of plenteous immersion. The indulgence enjoyed during the greater portion of the afternoon cost, I believe, only three or four francs.

The ambulatory bath may often be seen in transit through Paris streets, and must be a great boon to invalids and involuntary stay-at-homes. Excellent public baths exist in every quarter, but except in the most luxurious modern flats and hotels, bath-rooms are non-existent. Veteran Parisians can still remember the time when the water-supply of Paris was performed by hand, Auvergnats carrying pailsful to regular customers at a penny per pail. The more prosperous of these made their rounds with a donkey and cart bearing a barrel.

A historian I have frequently cited, M. Rambaud, gracefully acknowledges the impetus given to baths and bathing



in France by English example. "We borrowed many things from England" (1814-1848), he writes, "not the least valuable being bodily cleanliness, a habit of copious ablutions, personal hygiene, that had made scant progress during twenty-five years of military campaign." At the present time our neighbours are ardent devotees of *le tub*; *tuber* is now conjugated as a verb.

## CHAPTER II

# HOUSEKEEPING

### PART I

**F**RENCH housekeeping may be described as the glorification of simplicity, a supreme economy of time, outlay, and worry. Nothing more conspicuously exemplifies the ply of the French mind. In no other field is so well evidenced French love of method, economy, and mental repose.

I will first describe a day's housekeeping in Paris, the household consisting of nine or ten persons, four of whom are domestics, less than half the number that would be found necessary in England. Having sent cups of tea or coffee and rolls upstairs, and prepared coffee for the kitchen, the cook is free to go to market. Her fellow-servants help themselves to coffee from the hob and bread from the cupboard, each washing up his or her bowl when emptied. The milkwoman has deposited her can of milk, the baker has brought the day's huge supply of bread. No one will have business with the kitchen bell till next morning.

French meals, it must be remembered, are practically reduced to two; no elaborate breakfasts after English fashion, no nursery or school-room dinners, no afternoon teas. The wet-nurse dismissed, Béb  takes its place at the family board. The fashionable world certainly indulges in what is called a "five o'clock," but rarely, if ever, at home. The tea restaurant is a favourite rendezvous, and tea-drinking is strictly confined to its patronesses. In modest,

middle-class homes, the pleasantest meal of the day with us is quite unknown.

We will now follow our cook on her errands. Having taken orders from the mistress, she sets forth provided with two capacious baskets or string bags. As there are no tradesmen to call for orders, neither fishmonger, green-grocer, butcher, nor grocer, she can take matters easily, which in all likelihood she does. The French temperament is not given to flurry and bustle, and a daily marketer will naturally have a vast acquaintance.

But our cook will oftentimes fill her panniers nearer home than even at the nearest market.

A pictorial and heart-rejoicing sight is the Paris street barrow, ambulatory cornucopia piled high with fruit, flowers, and vegetables, the fertility of the most fertile country of Europe here focused on the city pavement. Small wonder if the caterer halts before one of these, tempted by freshest of green things in season—salads, herbs for flavouring, sorrel for soup, asparagus, artichokes or peas for her *entremets*. A halt, too, she will very likely make at a fruit barrow, providing herself with the dining-room dessert—luscious little wild strawberries (*fraises de quatre saisons*), melons, figs, whatever happens to be at its best.

But the day's provision of meat, poultry, fish, butter, and eggs has to be found room for, and in all probability she will conclude her purchases at the market, her joint or joints of meat wrapped in paper being consigned to the bottom of a pannier, lighter commodities lying on the top. Both receptacles being filled to the brim, she returns home, doubtless with aching arms, but well pleased to have enjoyed the fresh air and opportunities of chat. Thus it will be seen that in a French household the process is not, as with ourselves, one of elaboration, but the very reverse. The day's budget becomes as much a thing of the past as the day itself. There is no fagot of little red books for the mistress to look over and settle once a week, no possibility

of erroneous entries, no percentage paid for the booking and sending of goods.

And our cook, having only four meals to prepare, instead of her English colleague's half-score, can concentrate all her energies upon these.

The dinner, in French domestic economy, is as the sun to the planets. Every other operation is made subservient to it, every other incident revolves round it. For with our French neighbours the principal repast of the day is not merely a meal, it is a dinner. This nice distinction is happily indicated by the following story. A French friend was describing to me the fare of an English country inn and praising the day's fish, roast duck, and pudding; "But," she added as a rider, "it was a meal, not a dinner."

The mid-day *déjeuner*, now called lunch in fashionable society, is comparatively an insignificant affair, not deemed worthy of a tablecloth! Lunch, even in wealthy houses, is served on the bare table, and I must say that highly polished oak, mahogany, or walnut admirably set off plate, crystal, and flowers. We are all more or less slaves to conventionality and habit, and the things we deem becoming and appropriate are most often the things with which we are familiar.

That nice distinction just quoted indicates the relative importance of dinner in France and England. The minute care, indeed, bestowed upon the preparation of food by our neighbours is almost incomprehensible among ourselves. French folks, alike the moderately well off and the rich, are never satisfied with a meal. They must end the day with a dinner.

Irrespective of economy both in catering and cookery, it may safely be averred that the one French extravagance to set against a thousand English extravagances is the dinner. It is the only case of addition instead of subtraction when balancing French and English items of daily expenditure. And the charm of French dinners, like the

beauty of Frenchwomen, to quote Michelet, is made up of little nothings. The very notion of preparing so many elaborate trifles for the family board would drive an English cook mad. But "Lucullus dines with Lucullus" is a French motto of universal acceptance. Plutarch tells us that the great Roman art collector and epicure thus admonished his house-steward, who, knowing one day that his master was to dine alone, served up what my French friend would call a meal, not a dinner.

Michelet says somewhere that the French workman, who comes home tired and perhaps depressed from his day's work, is straightway put in good humour by his plateful of hot soup. For "Lucullus dines with Lucullus" is a maxim of the good housewife in the humblest as well as the upper ranks.

Those well-filled panniers represent one kind of economy, the national genius for cookery implies another. In buying direct from the market a certain percentage is saved. Again, a French cook turns any and every thing to advantage, and many a culinary *chef-d'œuvre* is the result of care and skill rather than rare or costly ingredients. With just a pinch of savoury herbs and a clear fire, a cook will turn shreds of cold meat into deliciously appetizing morsels, gastronomic discrimination on the part of her patrons keeping up the standard of excellence. If I were asked to point out the leading characteristic of the French mind, I should unhesitatingly say that it is the critical faculty, and to this faculty we owe not only the unrivalled French *cuisine*, but pleasures of the table generally. Here is one instance in point. One quite ripe melon, to the uninitiated, tastes very much like another. But a French country gentleman knows better. Whenever a melon of superlative flavour is served, he orders the seeds to be set aside for planting. Thus the superlative kind is propagated. The critical faculty warring with mediocrity and incompleteness is ever alert in France.



I now turn to the subject of household management generally. Here, also, we shall find startling divergences.

A distinctive feature in French households is, as I have said, the amount of indoor work done by men. When the great novelist Zola met his death so tragically, it will be remembered that two men-servants—one of these a *valet de chambre*, or house-servant—had prepared the house for the return of master and mistress. Apparently no woman was kept except, perhaps, madame's maid. This is often the case.

In England the proportion of men to women indoor servants is as one to three or four; in France the reverse is the case, parlour-maids being unknown, and the one *femme de chambre* being ladies' as well as housemaid. The work mainly falls upon the men. They sweep, dust, and, in short, supply the place of our neat maidens in spotless cotton gowns. The fact is, had French valets no sweeping or dusting, they would often have to sit for hours with their hands before them. One element entailing a large staff of servants here is absent in a French house. This is the staying guest, the uninterrupted succession of visitors. Outside private hotels and the handsome flats of the fashionable quarters, there is indeed no room in Parisian households for friends. The words "dine and sleep" or "week-end" visits have not found their way into French dictionaries, nor have dine-and-sleep or week-end guests yet become a French institution. Of family parties in châteaux and country houses I shall have something to say further on. It is easy thus to understand why three or four servants suffice, whilst in England a dozen would be needed for people of similar means and position. Descending the social or rather financial scale, coming to incomes of hundreds rather than thousands a year, we must still subtract and subtract. Where three or four maids are kept in England, a general servant is kept in France, and where a maid-of-all-work is put up with here,

French housewives do without a Tilly Slowboy or even a Marchioness.

Whilst officials, alike civilian and military, receive much lower pay in France than in England, whilst professional earnings are much less, we must remember that taxation is higher and commodities of all kinds are dearer across the water than among ourselves. But economy is not always a matter of strict obligation. What we call putting the best foot foremost does not often trouble our neighbours. They prefer to look ahead and provide against untoward eventualities.

A habit of parsimony is sometimes whimsically displayed.

The home is an Englishwoman's fetish, her idol. Both the wife of an artisan and the mistress of a mansion will be perpetually renovating and beautifying her interior. Like themselves, decoration and upholstery must be in the fashion.

In France the furnishing and fitting up of a house is done for once and for all. It is a matter of finality. English middle-class folks, who eat Sunday's sirloin cold for dinner on Monday and perhaps Tuesday, spend more upon their homes in a twelvemonth than French folks of the same standing throughout the entire course of their wedded lives.

May not the fact of so little being spent upon the house occasionally arise in this way? The husband has the absolute control, not only of his own income, but of his wife's, and many men would prefer shabby carpets and curtains to what might appear to them as unnecessary outlay.

The French character, to quote that original writer and sturdy Anglophile, M. Demolins,\* is not apt at spending. Here, he says, his country-people must go to school to the Anglo-Saxon.

\* "A-t-on intérêt à s'emparer du pouvoir?" Paris : Firmin-Didot.

Even where elementary comfort, even bodily health, is concerned, thrift is the first consideration. When Rabelais jovially apostrophizes *un beau et clair feu*, "a good bright fire," he expresses the national appreciation of a luxury, for outside rich homes a fire is regarded rather as an indulgence than as a necessity. Fuel in France is economized after a fashion wholly inconceivable to an English mind. When a French lady pays visits or goes abroad shopping, her fire is let out and relighted on her return. Many women fairly well-off make a woollen shawl and a foot-warmer do duty for a fire, except perhaps when it is freezing indoors.

I once spent a winter at Nantes, and during my stay kept my bed with bronchitis for a week.

"You have burnt as much fuel during your week in bed as would suffice many a family for the whole winter," said the lady with whom I was lodging, to me. Yet Nantes enjoys an exceptionally mild climate. What my consumption of wood would have been at Dijon I cannot conceive.

Housekeeping implies mention of the housekeeper. A Frenchwoman is the direct antithesis of a German *Hausfrau*. She is not, like Martha, troubled from morning till night about many things. Dust and cobwebs do not bring a Frenchwoman's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. The scrupulosity attained in English houses by the usual army of house and parlour maids is never aspired to by French matrons.

Some years since I lunched with acquaintances in a fine country house, rather a modern château, within an hour and a half by road and rail of Dijon. The house-party, all members or connections of master and mistress, numbered twelve. It was the long vacation, and a further indication of the sumptuary scale is afforded by the existence of a private chapel. Whether or no a priest was attached to the house as a private chaplain I know not. There was



the chapel, a new, handsome little building, standing in the park.

As I chatted with my hostess on the terrace after lunch, the topic of housekeeping came up.

"A rather onerous position," I said, "that of mistress here?"

She smiled. "So I imagined it must be when, on the death of my husband's parents, we came to this place. But I made up my mind not to let things trouble me—in fact, to let the house keep itself, which it does, and does well enough."

"Admirably," I ventured to add; and, indeed, my experience convinces me that most French houses keep themselves. The German *Speisekammer*, or store-room, in which a *Hausfrau* spends half her day, does not exist in French dwellings. A Frenchwoman, moreover, is far too much the companion of her husband to have leisure for such absorption in spices, jams, and the rest.

## PART II.

The following figures and calculations have been supplied by experienced French householders. Although a quarter of a century ago I spent an unbroken twelve-month in Brittany, and since that period have passed a sum-total of many years on French soil, I have always lodged under native roofs and sat down to native boards. Whilst pretty well acquainted with the cost of living among our neighbours, I could not authoritatively parcel out incomes, assigning the approximate sum to each item of domestic expenditure. Friendly co-operation alike from Paris and the provinces has enabled me to prepare these pages. For the convenience of readers I give each set of figures its equivalent in our money. I add that the

accompanying data have all reached me within the last few months.

We may assume that where English officials, professional, naval and military men, and others are in receipt of £500 or £600 a year, their French compeers receive or earn deputy's pay, *i.e.* 9000 francs, just £360; adding 1000 francs more, we obtain a sum-total of £400 a year. Such incomes may be regarded as the mean of middle-class salaries and earnings, and whilst these are much lower than in England, living is proportionately dearer. Hence the necessity of strict economy. Very little, if any, margin is left for many extras looked upon by ourselves as necessities of existence. Take, for instance, an extra dear to the British heart, the cult of appearances, Dame Ashfield's ever-recurring solicitude as to Mrs. Grundy's opinion in the play.

So long as reputation, and the toilette, are beyond reproach, a French housewife troubles her head very little about standing well with the world. Feminine jealousy is not aroused by a neighbour's superiority in the matter of furniture, or what is here called style of establishment. The second extra, this an enviable one, is the indulgence of hospitality. An English family living on £500 a year spend more on entertaining friends during twelve months than a French family of similar means and size would do in as many years, and for the excellent reason that means are inadequate. Our neighbours are not infrequently misjudged by us here. We are too apt to impute inhospitality to moral rather than material reasons.

We begin, therefore, with the mean—that is to say, incomes of 10,000 francs, *i.e.* £400 a year, and of persons resident in Paris. Here is such a budget: parents, two children old enough to attend day-schools or lycées, and a servant making up the household.

	£	s.	d.
Income . . . . .	400	0	0
Rent . . . . .	60	0	0
Taxes . . . . .	7	4	0
Food and vin ordinaire of three adults and two children . . . . .	149	0	0
Servant's wages . . . . .	16	16	0
Two lycées or day-schools . . . . .	32	0	0
Dress of four persons . . . . .	60	0	0
Lights and firing . . . . .	24	0	0
Total . . . . .	346	0	0
Balance for doctors' bills, travel, pocket-money, amusement, etc. . . . .	54	0	0

The amount of taxation seems small, but it must be borne in mind that food, clothing, medicines, indeed almost every article we can mention, are taxed in France.

The sum-total of £7 4s. covers *contributions directes*, i.e. taxes levied by the state and municipality directly and quite apart from *octroi* duties. Rents under £20 in Paris and £8 in the provinces are exempt. Municipal charges are always on the increase. A friend living at Passy has just informed me that her tiny flat, consisting of two small bedrooms, sitting-room, and kitchen, hitherto costing £28 a year, has just been raised to £32, and it is the same with expensive tenements.

The following figures will explain the apparently disproportionate sum-total expended on the table alike in Paris and, as we shall see further on, throughout the provinces. Butter, in what is pre-eminently a butter-making country, costs from 1s. 3d. to 2s. 6d. a pound (the French livre of 500 grammes is 1 lb. 3 ozs. in excess of our own). Gruyère cheese, another home-product, from 1s. to 1s. 4d., chickens from 1s. 3d. to 2s. per pound weight, milk 5d. a quart, bread 2d. a pound, meat (according to joint) 1s. 2d. to 1s. 6d. and 2s. Fruit grown on French soil is double the price at which it is sold in England. Thus bananas and oranges, grown by the million in Algeria, cost 2d. each.

Coffee is from 2s. to 2s. 6d., tea from 2s. 6d. to 6s., sugar 5d. to 6d. a pound. The penny bun—that delight of childhood—is unknown in Paris. The *brioche* or *madeleine*, little cakes half the size of the penny bun, cost 1½d. each. A currant cake, under the weight of a 6d. one here, costs 1s. 3d. These are current prices. The result of such high prices is that French householders find it easier to reduce any item of expenditure rather than that of the table. In the case of persons living alone the cost is naturally higher. Thus my correspondents assure me that such caterers for themselves only cannot live in Paris under 2s. 6d. a day, this sum covering plain diet only, with a very moderate allowance of *vin ordinaire*.\* The extra ½d. on bread is a serious matter to an essentially bread-eating people, three pounds (*i.e.* 3 lbs. 4½ ozs.) being the daily consumption of the average Frenchman.

The low-priced restaurants of business quarters doubtless mislead many travellers. I should say that the plateful of roast beef or mutton supplied with potatoes for 1s. in the Strand contains at least a third more nutriment than the tempting little dish offered with a *hors d'œuvre* for 1s. 5d. on the boulevards. The *hors d'œuvre* I expatiate upon lower down.

The average cost of a Frenchman's plain lunch and dinner at a quiet, well-ordered house of the better sort, with tips, cannot be under 5s. or 6s. a day. I allude to officials of standing compelled by their avocations to breakfast and dine at an eating-house.

The wages set down in the foregoing table seem excessively moderate for Paris, but, as my correspondent informs me, the fact of keeping a servant at all under such circumstances implies very great economy in other matters. A parallel budget—that is to say, the yearly expenditure

\* In M. Bourget's new novel with a purpose ("Un Divorce"), in describing the life of a poor lady studying medicine in Paris he sets down the cost of her food at cheap restaurants at something like £1 per week.

of a similar family with a similar income—allows a more liberal margin for food, no domestic being kept.

Wages of good servants are high in Paris; the cost of a capable maid-of-all-work, including board, washing, wages, and New Year's gifts, cannot be calculated, my friend assures me, at less than £60 a year. Thus many families of the middle ranks do with the occasional services of a charwoman, thereby economizing at least £40 annually for other purposes.

Fuel is another onerous item of domestic expenditure. Writing from Paris on February 24, 1894, a householder informed me that good coals cost £2 16s. the ton. No wonder that in moderate households firing is economized as in the home of Eugénie Grandet.

And many French temperaments seem positively invulnerable, appear to be cold proof by virtue of habit, or, maybe, heredity. I know a Frenchwoman whose happy immunity it is never to feel cold. No matter the weather, she needs neither fire, foot-warmer, nor warm clothing. A certain French physique exists, matchless for hardiness and powers of resistance.

The dearness of combustibles is equalled in other matters. -

From a postage stamp upward—there are neither penny stamps nor halfpenny postcards in France—we may safely assume that every commodity costs a third more on the other side of the Channel.

Spills and spill-cases are as obsolete in England as the tinder-boxes and snuffer trays of our great grandparents. But lucifer matches since 1871 have been a state monopoly in France. Whereas we get a dozen boxes for 2½d., our neighbours still pay 1d. for one, and that one containing lights of an inferior kind. A match is never struck by French people when a gas jet and a spill are available.

Drugs and patent medicines are incredibly dear. No wonder that every country house and cottage has its store



of home-made simples and remedies. Some eighteen months since, I fell ill in Paris, and a friendly physician prescribed for me. One week's remedies ran up to £1. Four shillings were charged for a dozen cachets, composed of a similar substance which would, a chemist informed me, have cost just two here.

Little wonder also that families with an income limited to £300 or £400 a year cannot afford even a Tilly Slowboy, whilst an outing to the sea or the country during a long vacation is equally out of the question. My first correspondent informs me that, unless paternal hospitality is available, Parisians so situated would very seldom get a holiday away from home. Fortunately, many folks have some farmhouse of parents or grandparents to retreat to in the dog days.

A considerable item in remaining sum-totals is that of *étrennes*, or New Year's gifts. We grumble at being mulcted when Yuletide comes round. What should we think of 100 francs, £4, a year for Christmas boxes out of an annual £300 or £400? Yet the unfortunate French, rather we should say Parisian, householder, whose income is much lower, must set aside at least 100 francs for the inevitable *étrennes*. There is the *concierge*, to begin with, that all-important and not always facile or conciliatory janitress of Parisian blocks. Fail to satisfy your *concierge* when New Year's day comes round, and you must be prepared for small vexations throughout the year.

Next to *concierge*, maid-of-all-work, or charwoman, come postman, telegraph boy, gas or electric-light *employés*, baker, milkwoman, and the rest, New Year's gifts reaching a much higher figure in proportion to means than among ourselves. The *étrennes* make an appreciable hole in small balances.

Tips are also high, and as Parisians who are narrowly housed and unprovided with servants do their scanty entertaining in restaurants, such items help to limit this kind

of hospitality. In fact, of all luxuries in Paris, that of feasting one's friends is the most costly.

I will here say something about dress. The sum of £60 in the foregoing tabulation allows £20 each for husband and wife, half that sum for each child, say a boy and a girl attending day-schools.

As Frenchwomen in such a position are always well dressed, the question arises, how is the matter managed?

In the first place, if from her earliest years a French girl is taught the arch importance of *la toilette*, with equal insistence is inculcated economy in the wearing.

Thus the schoolgirl, whether at school or preparing her lessons at home, will always wear a black stuff bib apron for the proper protection of her frock, with sleeves of the same material tied above the elbow. The first-mentioned article is particularized in the prospectus of the *lycée*. Boarders at these colleges created by virtue of the Ferry laws of December, 1880, as at convent schools, are compelled to wear a neat and serviceable uniform. The prospectus of the *lycée* of Toulouse shows that among the articles of apparel must be two aprons of black woollen material, cut according to a given pattern, the object being to protect the two costumes made by a dressmaker under the lady principal's orders. It is not only the cost of materials, but of dressmaking, that necessitates such care. As an inevitable consequence of dear food and lodging, dressmakers and seamstresses are obliged to charge proportionately for their labour. The chambermaid of a hotel in Paris I sometimes stay at, lately told me that she could not get a Sunday gown made under £1. "And," she added, "seeing what a young woman has to pay for her room, let alone provisions, I could not ask her to take a halfpenny less."

A French lady must not only never be shabby, she must never be out of fashion. Oddly enough, one of the wittiest sayings on this subject was uttered by an

Englishman. "No well-dressed woman ever looks ugly," wrote Bulwer Lytton—a saying, or rather a conviction, taken to heart in France.

I well remember an illustrative instance. Calling some years since on a very moderately paid official at Grenoble, I was received by his wife, a decidedly ordinary-looking and slovenly young woman, wearing a dingy morning wrap. Her husband soon entered. Madame left us to discuss farming matters, ten minutes later looking in to say adieu. Like Bottom, she was wonderfully translated. In her pretty bonnet and elegant, if inexpensive walking costume, her hair becomingly arranged, *bien chaussée et gantée*, well shod and gloved, she looked almost lovely. But at what cost of time and ingenuity such toilettes are obtained only such a Frenchwoman could tell you.

The economical have recourse to the *maison de patrons*, or pattern shop. Ladies living in the country send measures to these Parisian houses and obtain patterns of the latest fashions, either in paper or canvas. With the help of a clever needlewoman, hired by the day, dresses can thus be made to look as if they had just come from the boulevards or the Rue Royale.

As we should naturally expect, the cost of living is considerably less in the provinces. Here, for instance—supplied me by another correspondent—is the budget of a similar family, *i.e.* husband and wife, two children, and a woman servant, having an income of 8000 francs, or £300 a year—

	£	s.	d.
Rent and taxes . . . . .	36	0	0
Servant's wages . . . . .	14	8	0
Food, five persons . . . . .	100	0	0
Dress for four persons, two adults and children .	48	0	0
Two lycées or day-schools . . . . .	20	0	0
Firing, lights, laundress . . . . .	32	0	0
	<hr/>		
	250	8	0
Balance left . . . . .	70	0	0



These items represent expenses of living in a cathedral town 2000 miles from Paris. Here certain articles of daily consumption are considerably cheaper. Meat at Dijon costs 8*d.* to 1*s.* the pound, butter 8*d.*, fruit and vegetables are lower in price; rent also and education. Thus we find a difference of £12 in the cost of two lycées, or day-schools.

The same correspondent has calculated the balance of similar income and tantamount charges in Paris. The discrepancy is suggestive. Allowing £48 for rent and taxes, £120 for food, £48 for dress, and so on in proportion, she found that just £21 would remain for amusements, medical attendance, and extras generally.

The next budget is the weekly one of a married *employé* or clerk in Paris, having one child aged six, his entire income being £160 a year. Every item has been set down for me as from a housewife's day-book, and, in addition to figures, I have a general description of daily existence economically considered.

	£	s.	d.
Food and wine . . . . .	1	1	2
Rent . . . . .		9	11
Dress . . . . .		11	1
Firing . . . . .		3	6
Lights and laundress . . . . .		5	10
Amusements, stationery, and personal expenses generally . . . . .		5	10
Weekly total . . . . .	2	17	4
The year of fifty-two weeks . . . . .	149	1	4
Balance . . . . .	10	18	8

I will now state precisely what is obtained for this outlay—describe, in fact, how the little family lives.

In the morning they take coffee, with bread and butter, followed at midday by *déjeuner*, consisting of meat, vegetables, and what is called dessert, namely, fruit, with perhaps biscuits or cheese. At four o'clock madame and the

child have a roll and a bit of chocolate, and at half-past six or seven the family sit down to dinner, or rather supper, soup, vegetables, and dessert, often without any meat, constituting the last meal of the day.

On Sundays is enjoyed the usual *extra de dimanche* of the small Parisian householder. Our friends lunch at home; then, alike in summer and winter, they sally forth to spend the rest of the day abroad. Winter afternoons are whiled away in music-halls, bright warm hours a few miles out of Paris, dinner at a restaurant, coffee or liqueur on the boulevards finishing the day.

The expense of these Sunday outings sometimes amounts to 8s. or 10s., an indulgence often involving deprivations during the week.

Except among the rich, hospitality in Paris, as I have already remarked, is reduced to the minimum. Nevertheless folks living on 3000 or 4000 francs a year will occasionally entertain their relations or friends, and, owing to two agencies, that of the *hors d'œuvre* and the *rôtisseur*, at very small cost and trouble.

Thrift, indeed, in France often wears an engaging aspect; the sightly becomes ancillary to the frugal, and of all elegant economies the *hors d'œuvre*, or side dish, served before luncheon, is the most attractive. Whether displayed on polished mahogany or snowy linen, how appetizing, and at the same time how ornamental, are these little dishes, first-fruits of the most productive and most assiduously cultivated country in the world—tiny radishes from suburban gardens, olives from Petrarch's valley, sardines from the Breton coast, the far-famed *rillettes* or brawn of Tours, the still more famous pâtés of Périgueux, every region supplying its special yield, every town its special dainty, pats of fresh butter and glossy brown loaves completing the preparations!

Until lately I had regarded the *hors d'œuvre* on luncheon tables of modest households as a luxury, an extravagance

of the first water. A French lady has just enlightened me on the subject.

"The *hors d'œuvre* an extravagance!" she exclaimed. "It is the exact reverse. Take the case of myself and family, three or four persons in all. We have, say, a small roast joint or fowl on Sunday at midday, but always begin with a *hors d'œuvre*, a slice of ham, stuffed eggs, a few prawns, or something of the kind. As French folks are large bread-eaters, we eat so much bread with our eggs or prawns that by the time the roast joint is served, the edge of appetite is taken off, and enough meat is left for dinner. So you see the *hors d'œuvre* is a real saving."

The *rôtisseur*, or purveyor of hot meat, soups, and vegetables, plays as important a part in Parisian domestic economy as in the play of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. You are invited, for instance, to dine with friends who keep no servants. On arriving, your first impression is that you are mistaken in the day. No savoury whiffs accord gastro-nomic welcome. Through the half-open kitchen door you perceive the tiny flame of a spirit-lamp only. Nothing announces dinner. But a quarter of an hour later, excellent and steaming hot soup is served by a *femme de ménage* or charwoman, the obligatory side dish a vegetable and *rôti* follow; the *rôtisseur* in the adjoining street has enabled your hosts to entertain you at the smallest possible cost and to the exclusion of anything in the shape of worry. Quiet folks, also, who like to spend Sunday afternoons with friends or in the country, and who prefer to dine at home, find the *rôtisseur* a great resource. They have only to order what they want, and precisely to the moment appears a *gâte-sauce*, or cook-boy, with the hot dishes piled pyramidally on his head.

We will now consider the budget of an artisan, skilled workman, or petty clerk (*employé subalterne*), whose weekly wages amount to 40 francs, *i.e.* 32s.; the average, I am

assured, at the present time. A friend at Reims has made out the following tabulation :—

	£	s.	d.
Weekly income . . . . .	1	12	0
<i>Expenditure—</i>			
Food of four persons, two adults and two children aged from 5 to 10 years . . . . .		16	10
Lodging . . . . .		4	0
Clothes and house linen . . . . .		1	7
Shoes . . . . .			10
Lights and firing . . . . .		1	5
Pocket-money of husband, newspapers and amusements . . . . .		4	7
Total . . . . .	1	9	3
Balance . . . . .		2	9

This little balance, my correspondent informs me, will be spent upon the various *Sociétés de Prévoyance* and *Secours Mutuels*, associations, answering to our own working-men's clubs, and to the system of the post office deferred annuities. The bread-winner's pocket money supplies his tobacco, occasional glass of beer or something of the kind, his daily newspapers, the monthly subscription of fivepence to a *Bibliothèque populaire*, or reading-club, and the family *extra de dimanche*, an outing on Sundays by rail or tramway, or tickets for the theatre. Presumably, also, although this item is not mentioned, the father of a family, as in England, provides himself out of this *argent de poche* with boots and best clothes.

At Reims, as elsewhere in the provinces, we must take into account that living is much cheaper than in Paris. Thus in the former city coals, all the year round, cost 1s. 8d. the sack of 110 lbs. (50 kilos), vin ordinaire 5d. the litre or 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  pint, beer 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. the litre. Garden and dairy produce is also cheaper. Lodgings which would cost £18 or £20 a year in Paris can be had for £10 or £12 in provincial cities. Education is non-sectarian, gratuitous, and obligatory throughout France. Even the bulk of what is

called *fourniture scolaire*, i.e. copybooks, pencils, etc., is supplied by the richer municipalities. But in the eyes of anxious and needy mothers the primary school is ever an onerous affair. Watch a troop of youngsters emerging from an *école communale*, many belonging to well-to-do artisans and others, many to the very poor. From head to foot—one and all will be equally tidy, black linen pinafores or blouses protecting tunics and trousers. With girls we see the same thing. A Frenchwoman, however poor, regards rags as a disgrace.

One highly characteristic fact pointed out by my Reims friend I must on no account omit. It seems that the working classes throughout France, from the well-paid mechanic to the poorest-paid journeyman, invariably possess a decent mourning, or rather a ceremonial, suit. Thus every man owns black trousers, frock-coat, waistcoat, necktie and gloves, and silk hat. He is ready at the shortest notice to attend a funeral, assist at a wedding, or take part in any public celebration. Every working woman keeps by her a black robe, bonnet, and mantle or shawl. When overtaken by family losses, therefore, even the very poor are not at a loss for decent black in which to attend the interment. The scrupulously cared-for garments are ready in the family wardrobe.

My correspondent adds the following table of actual salaries and wages in this great industrial city :—

Head clerks (*employés principaux*) in the champagne and wine trade, from £160 a year upwards, with a percentage on sales ; in the woollen trade the same figures hold good—small clerks (*petits employés*) from £4 to £8 per month ; clerks and assistants in shops from £3 4s. to £6 per month ; workmen in manufactories 3s. 2d. to 4s. per day ; masons and plasterers 4s. 9d. per day, or from 4d. to 8d. per hour ; foremen in factories from 6s. 6d. to 7s. per day ; women in factories 2s. to 2s. 6d., and boys 1s. 8d. to 2s. 6d.

The writer further informs me that, although the Benefit



Society, *Prevoyant de l'Avenir*, is very prosperous, the situation of the working man, on the whole, is unsatisfactory. Too many are in debt for rent and other matters. The explanation doubtless lies in the tariff of cheap stimulants and intoxicants appended to these figures : *absinthe*, *eau de vie de marc*, and *apéritifs divers*. The drink evil is now in France, as with us, the question of the hour.

The tabulated budgets of workmen, living respectively in Paris and Dijon, supplied by a friend, will show that even with much lower wages the Dijonnais is considerably better off.

	£	s.	d.
Thus the yearly wages of the first at £1 13s. 7d.			
per week amount to . . . . .	87	6	4
His expenses . . . . .	83	4	0
Leaving a balance of . . . . .	4	2	4
The yearly wages of the second at £1 4s.			
amount to . . . . .	62	8	0
His expenses . . . . .	56	0	0
Leaving a balance of . . . . .	6	8	0

The Parisian's rent for one or two rooms will cost him £18 yearly ; the food of himself, wife, and two children £47, clothes £12, and so on in proportion ; whilst the provincial, similarly situated, will economize £6 on rent, £17 on food, £4 on clothes.

If three persons in Paris, having an income of as many pounds a week, can only afford meat once a day, how small must be the butcher's bill of the working classes ! In most cases, alike in Paris and in the provinces, a man's wages are supplemented by earnings of his wife. An experienced lady writes to me on this subject—

“The condition of the working-man's home depends absolutely on the wife. Generally speaking, a wife adds at least £12 a year to the family income, and she not only manages to maintain the household in comfort, but to lay by. Economy is the supreme talent of the French *ménagère*.”

The adroit Parisienne can turn her hand to anything. Ironing, charring, cooking, call a mother away from home. Indoor work is found for agile fingers.

The lounge in Paris, especially in old Paris, will unexpectedly light upon these home industries, the means by which working women supplement their husband's earnings. I was lately visiting a doll's dressing warehouse near the Rue de Temple, when my companion, a French lady, called my attention to a certain window. The tenement was that of a humble *concierge*, doorkeeper of an ancient house let out as business premises. On a small deal table immediately under the uncurtained and wide open casement—for the weather was hot—lay a heap of small circular objects in delicate mauve satin and swansdown. What they might be I could not conceive. "See," said my companion, taking up one of the articles, "here is one of the home industries you were inquiring about just now. This good woman earns money in spare moments by making these envelopes for powder-puffs; in all probability they will be wadded and finished off with a button by another hand, or maybe at the warehouse. Many women work in this way for toyshops and bazaars."

The marvel was that the little bags of pale mauve satin and swansdown should, under the circumstances, remain spotless. Put together at odd times, heaped on a bare deal table which looked like the family dinner-table, not so much as a newspaper thrown over them, all yet remained immaculate, ready for great ladies' toilettes. The secret doubtless lay in the swiftness and dexterity of French fingers and the comparatively pure atmosphere. What would become of similar materials exposed to the smuttiness of a back street in London?

In no field does a French housewife's thrift more conspicuously manifest itself than in cookery. The fare of a Parisian workman, if not so nutritious as that of his London compeer, is at least as appetizing. Thus, a basin of soup

is often a man's meal before setting out to work. Water, in which a vegetable has been boiled, will be set aside for this purpose, a bit of butter or bacon added, and there will be a savoury mess in which to steep his pound of bread. The excessive dearness of provisions puts a more solid nutriment out of the question. Thus bacon costs 1s. 6d. the pound, and the high price of butter drives poor folk to the use of margarine.

Whether the pleasant and apparently fresh butter supplied in Parisian restaurants is adulterated or no I cannot say. This I know, that a friend living in Paris has for years abjured butter from a horror of margarine. And here I add a hint to fastidious eaters. In order to make up for the missing butter with cheese, this gentleman mixes several kinds of cheese together at dessert—Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, a delicious compound, I am assured.

In humble restaurants may be seen long bills of fare, each dish priced at sums varying from 2½d. to 5d. Workmen in white blouses sit down out-of-doors to these dishes, which look appetizing enough. I have never ventured to try them. I am assured, however, that it is only the very poor of Paris who patronize horseflesh, and you have to make a long voyage of discovery before lighting upon the shop sign, a horse's head and the inscription, *Boucherie de cheval*, or *Boucherie chevaline*. One such shop sign I remember to have seen in the neighbourhood of the Rue Roquette.

Money is so hardly earned by the Parisian workman and workwoman, and existence is such a struggle, that we need not wonder at the deadly tenacity with which earnings are clutched at. When some years ago the Opéra Comique blazed, amid a scene awful as that of a battlefield, the women attendants thought of their tips, the half franc due here and there for a footstool. Unmindful of their own peril and that of others, they rushed to and fro, besieging half-suffocated, half-demented creatures for their money !



A similar scene happened during the terrible catastrophe on the Paris underground railway last year. Although the delay of a few seconds might mean life or death, many workmen refused to move from the crowded station, clamouring for the return of the forfeited twopenny ticket.

When M. Edmond Demolins sets down the French character as the least possible adapted to spending, in other words, to the circulation of capital, he hits upon what is at once the crowning virtue and the paramount weakness of his country-people. Money in French eyes means something on no account whatever to be lightly parted with, absolute necessity, and absolute necessity alone, most often condoning outlay. But there is a shining side to this frugality. French folks do not affect a certain sumptuary style for the sake of outsiders, such unpretentiousness imparting a dignity mere wealth cannot bestow. The following incident opened my eyes to French standards long ago.

I had been spending a few days with a French friend, widow of an officer at Pornic, and on returning to Nantes took a third-class ticket. The astonishment of my hostess I shall not forget.

"I always travel first class," she exclaimed, after a little chat about the matter of trains, adding, "but I do not travel often, and I am rich. I have an income of £200 a year."

Of which I doubt not she seldom spent two-thirds. And in this supreme sense the vast majority of French folks are rich, ay, and often "beyond the dreams of avarice."

### CHAPTER III

## HOLIDAY-MAKING

A FRENCHMAN'S notion of holiday is to see as much as possible of his relations, and to gather his own peaches. When the long vacation comes, with its burning skies, valetudinarians betake themselves to Contrexéville, Pougues-les-Bains, or equally favourite spas; family parties animate the Breton and Norman coasts; cyclists by the thousand invade the once solitary fastnesses of Fontainebleau; a few, a very few, adventurous spirits start for the Swiss mountains, Scotch rivers, or Norwegian fiords. By far the greater number merely change one home for another, the town flat for the country house, villa, or cottage.

The result of the French Revolution has been a material levelling up. Whilst in England the possession of a town and country residence implies wealth and social position, in France the case is quite otherwise. Just as all but the very poor and the *declassés* sit under the shadow of their own vine and fig-tree, so the well-to-do middle classes, like the *noblesse*, now own a rural retreat in which to pass the villégiature. The houseless or rent-paying in France, indeed, form a mere remnant, a handful. In an official work on this subject ("L'Habitation en France," par A. de Foville: Paris, 1894), we find that whilst in many departments seventy and even eighty per cent. of the inhabitants occupy houses belonging to them, the average of the entire eighty-six departments is sixty-four!\*

\* These figures, of course, hold good with regard to communes only. In towns folks live mostly in flats, several families occupying a block.





HOLIDAY AMUSEMENTS

F. DELACROIX & SONS, PARIS

Parisians have their country houses within easy distance of the capital; provincial lawyers, advocates, professors and men of business do not care to go far afield in search of refreshment and recreation. They migrate to the family *campagne*. For many years I was often a guest in a Burgundian village half an hour by rail from Dijon, my kind hosts forming part of a patriarchal group. No less than six families, more or less closely related, had here their handsome houses and large gardens. One head of a house—rather, I should say, one paterfamilias, the wife and mother in France being ever the head of the house—was an advocate, another a lawyer, a third a notary, and so on. Great-grandmother, grandparents, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, uncles, aunts, and cousins made up a little society, the members apparently needing no other. As all were in opulent circumstances that kind of holiday-making must have been quite voluntary. One lady, indeed, once went with her young daughter to Vichy; and my hostess, a venerable dame, accompanied by her son, grandson, and myself, once got so far as St. Honoré-les-Bains, a hydropathic resort charmingly situated a few hours off by rail. These flittings were undertaken for health's sake, and were quite exceptional. The long vacation merely meant a renewal of family intercourse under other circumstances. Grandmothers chatted in the garden instead of in the salon; the young people played croquet, which they certainly could not do in town; *avoué*, *avocat*, and *notaire*, instead of hob-nobbing at café or club, shouldered their guns and went abroad in search of partridges, or in wet weather played whist and dominoes. No one seemed to find the annual villégiature a trifle monotonous. The day was snailed through pleasantly enough, and with the least possible expenditure of energy. To economize vital force, I should say, is the end and aim, not only of these country lawyers and barristers, but of many, perhaps most, people in France. English folks in



similar circumstances would have had neighbours calling, garden-parties, picnics, every day. To the best of my knowledge, from the first of August till the middle of October, M. le Curé, M. le Percepteur (a functionary having quite a different position to our own tax collector), and myself were the only outsiders seen within the six different houses. Upon one occasion a picnic was given, rather an *al fresco* luncheon in a *clos* or walled-in vineyard. The spot selected lay within a few hundred yards of everybody's dwelling, the six families all living within earshot of each other. Thus the guests had only to step out of their gardens, and the servants' goings to and fro were reduced to the minimum.

Professional men in Paris and large cities who belong to the houseless minority generally keep holiday with relations. Husband, wife, and their "little family," the said little family generally consisting of a single and very spoiled bantling, are received by parents on either side, if they happen to live in the country. This arrangement is regarded as a matter of course. We must ever bear in mind that the French marriage is not an institution that detaches, but rather one that cements. Husband and wife are not thereby respectively separated from their parents. Instead of one father and one mother, each henceforth possesses two. And not infrequently there will be painful conflicts, a rebellion against divided influence and affection.

Others, again, who have neither country house of their own nor a parental refuge for the dog days, will indulge in the favourite *promenade en mer*, or sea-walk, at some inexpensive place. Since my near acquaintance with France began, by a twelvemonth's residence in Brittany twenty-five years ago, hundreds of little watering-places have sprung up on the west coast.

Seaside lodgings after English fashion have not found acceptance in France. These brand-new townlings by the sea do not consist of formal terraces, but of villas dotted







JUVENILE FORT-BUILDING

here and there like the cottages of a child's toy village. Economic folks hire a tiny *châlet* and cater for themselves, all kinds of privations and discomforts being good-naturedly endured; for the coveted *promenades en mer* evoke a livelier spirit than the installation in country house or under some familiar roof. And sea-bathing, with every other desirable thing, must here be taken in company. The notion of a bathing-machine, a hurried plunge, or solitary swim, is wholly unacceptable to the French mind. So when the burning glare of the day is over, family meets family on the sands, most sociably and unconventionally disporting themselves.

My first experience of sea-bathing after French fashion was gained at Les Sables D'Olonne, in Vendée, or Les Sables, as the place is aptly called. Never, I think, I saw sands so velvety smooth, so firm; and never do I remember a hotter place! Even in June folks could not stir abroad till towards evening, when the great business of the day began, the five-o'clock *promenade en mer* being in reality a constitutional turn before dinner. Emerging from their *cabines*, or dressing-closets, fronting the sea, poured forth the strangest company—men, women, and children walking into the sea, a distance of course varying with the tide, on the occasion I speak of about two furlongs.

Masqueraders at carnival could not present an odder, more whimsical appearance than these fashionable frequenters of Les Sables, equipped for the daily paddle. The children, in their gay, much be-frilled costumes, looked like so many juvenile harlequins; the ladies wore serge bathing-dresses trimmed with bright-coloured braid; the men, in their close-fitting cuirass-like garments of striped black and red or blue, might have passed for so many champion swimmers. Thus fancifully semi-clothed, merrily chatting, or toying with the waves, young and old took their amphibious stroll, doubtless returning with a first-rate appetite for dinner.

At Préfailles, near Pornie, in Brittany, which I visited a little later on, I found sea-bathing proper—the quiet sea at high tide populated with the oddest mermen and mermaids, all in the quaintest habiliments, and all wearing huge straw hats or gipsy bonnets, on account of the heat. A stout, elderly papa was teaching his children to swim, mamma, portly and middle-aged, in the water with the rest, and enjoying the excitement as much as any.

The seaside holiday is often, indeed, an excuse for family gatherings, friendly intercourse, and matchmaking! The *promenade en mer*, delightful as it is, will often be quite a secondary consideration.

Some watering-places especially lend themselves to social amenities. Thus at St. Georges-de-Didonne, near Royan, in the Charente Inférieure, the smooth sands admit of croquet parties and dances. During my stay of many weeks in that sweet spot some years ago I constantly heard of such entertainments. When French people do make up their minds to leave home, which is not often, they endeavour to get the utmost possible enjoyment out of their money. Here I would observe that the best way of knowing and appreciating our neighbours is to travel in their company, or rather, to have them for travelling companions.

I have been so privileged on many of my long French journeys, and the experience has opened my eyes upon many subjects. In the first place, French people never by any chance grumble when on their travels. They seem to regard the mere fact of being away from home such a wrench that minor discomforts are hardly worth consideration. Hence it comes about that in regions unfrequented by the fault-finding English, French hotels are still very much as they were under the *ancien régime*, sanitary arrangements not a whit more advanced than when Arthur Young bluntly wrote of them more than a hundred years ago.

The reason is simple. French travellers resent such





SEA-SIDE RIGHTS.—THE HARVEST OF THE SALT

THE HARVEST OF THE SALT (VENDEÉE)







antequations no less than ourselves, but shrug their shoulders with the remark, "We shall not come here again, why put ourselves out?"

Which attitude, from one point of view, is an amiable *après moi le déluge*, seeing that if no one ever complained hotel-keepers would imagine, like Candide, that everything was for the best in the best possible world.

My first fellow-traveller was an elderly lady, widow of an officer, with whom I took a delightful two weeks' driving tour in the highlands of Franche-Comté.

In early life Madame F—— had spent many years in St. Petersburg as governess in a highly placed Russian family, returning to France with a self-earned dowry, just upon a thousand pounds, at that time the regulation dowry of an officer's wife. An officer's wife she duly became, and excellently the marriage turned out she told me, for I had the whole story from her own lips. "The best of men was my husband," she invariably added when recurring to the past.

During our journey through a succession of picturesque but very primitive regions, both tempers and powers of endurance were severely taxed. The wayside inns could hardly have been worse in Arthur Young's time. Dirty, noisy, uncomfortable, our night's lodging was often so wretched that we obtained little sleep. Never before had I fared so badly in out-of-the-way France, which is saying a good deal. Charges were naturally low, and the people civil and obliging, but without the slightest notion of punctuality or exactitude. Nothing ruffled my companion's even mood, and her placability became almost as disconcerting as the beds we could not lie down in, the meals waited hours for, and other easily remedied drawbacks to enjoyment. A holiday tour and congenial society compensated for all minor inconveniences. Incidental discomforts seemed to be taken as part of the day's programme.

Upon another occasion, an old friend, a French officer, invited me to an *al fresco* breakfast on the banks of the Saône, near Lyons. A delightful two hours' drive brought us to the Île Barbe, a narrow, wooded islet forming the favourite holiday ground of the Lyonnais. In a restaurant overlooking river and wooded banks we had long to wait for a very poor *déjeuner* and a bottle of very bad wine.

As the charges are always high at such places, I suggested to my friend that he should make a complaint and demand another bottle.

"It would be the same thing," was his smiling reply. Sunshine, the lovely riverside prospect, congenial society, the sight of happy picnic parties outside, in his eyes more than made up for undrinkable wine highly priced.

As yet the horseless family coach must be considered the privilege of the rich. Motoring is too novel an element in holiday-making to be dealt with here.

I will now say something about house-parties during the long vacation, as upon other topics, strictly confining myself to personal experience.

In a pre-eminently intellectual nation like France we should naturally look for a very high tone in the matter of fireside recreation, nor are we at all likely to be disappointed. One exquisite art, allied to another even more fascinating, is especially cultivated by our neighbours.

On French soil the training of the speaking voice and the love of poetry go hand-in-hand. What accomplishment is better adapted to the family circle than that of rhetoric, the gift of reciting? Montaigne somewhere says that sentiments clothed in verse strike the mind with two-fold impact. This is especially the case with poetry "made vocal for the amusement of the rest." Declamation is generally taught in girls' schools, and when natural aptitude is carefully fostered the reciter wields a fairy wand.

As I write comes back to my mind enchanted evenings in a *château* of Lorraine. The September day over, with

its walks and drives, the house-party, excepting myself all members of the family, luxuriously ensconced before a wood fire, one voice would hold us spell-bound. The magician, a young daughter-in-law of the hosts, was richly endowed as to voice, memory, and histrionic power. Now she thrilled us with dramatic episode, now moved us to tears with pathetic idyll, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and contemporary poets, making up a large and varied repertory.

It has been my good fortune to hear a good deal of recitation in France; none ever charmed me as did that of this gifted young wife and mother. Rememberable, too, were hours spent in the music-room. My host and hostess, already grandparents, were excellent musicians, and on wet afternoons would invite me to the most charming pianoforte and violin recitals imaginable. Croquet, tennis, billiards, and other lighter entertainments varied the day's programme, and here I found none of that exclusiveness characterizing less cosmopolitan, homelier country houses, no Chinese wall hemming round the roof-tree. Monsieur had formerly occupied a diplomatic post, with himself madame belonged to the titled ranks, both had travelled much. A dinner-party at the *château*, therefore, did not consist of uncles, aunts, and cousins, but of neighbours, living perhaps a dozen miles off.

I add that among the travelled, leisurely classes we always hear English speech and find the latest Tauchnitz editions on the drawing-room table. And, oddly enough, proud as they are of their own incomparable language, our neighbours never by any chance whatever use it if they can express themselves *tant bien que mal* in the tongue of perfidious Albion, a compliment sometimes resented by over-sea visitors.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BABY

THE French baby usually comes into the world an heir. Outside the venue of penury and lawlessness, it may be said that every Gallic bantling is born with a silver spoon in its mouth. The Code Civil has made fathers in France mere usufructuaries of their children's fortune. "Thou shalt enrich thy offspring" is an eleventh commandment rigidly obeyed.

When a little Anglo-Saxon announces himself with kicks, screams, and doubling of his tiny fists, the attitude is symbolic. Unless he is born to a peerage or a million, his career, even in pacific fields, will be combative, earliest experiences evoking a spirit of enterprise, self-reliance, and, above all, compromise.

If a tiny Gaul behaves in similar fashion at the onset of life, his attitude soon changes. Mite as he is, he immediately discovers that there is not the slightest necessity to kick, scream, and double his fists. Everything he wants he gets without such expenditure of lungs and muscles. His nod is that of an infant Jupiter Olympus. For the French baby born of reputable wedlock is a unit, occasionally one of two—never a superfluity. When a fond French parent tells you that "*sa petite famille va bien*" (his little family is well), he means that the one boy or one girl of his house is in good health. When a Frenchman proudly informs you that he is "*père de famille*" (the father of a family), he means that he owns



a son or a daughter. With undivided sway the new-comer rules, not the nursery (nurseries being unknown in France), but the entire household. He is regarded as a quite transhuman entity, a phenomenon, a small divinity whose humour under no circumstances whatever is to be crossed. From the moment of his birth he is entrusted to a deputy mother—in other words, a wet nurse—who must never let her charge cry.

“Take my advice,” I once heard a young matron say to another, “and immediately dismiss your nurse if baby cries. I changed mine for Cécile half a dozen times before I succeeded in obtaining one who understood her business. Depend on it, if an infant cries the fault lies with the nurse.” The task of rearing infants under such conditions may seem onerous. The rewards are proportionate.

Next to the little heir or heiress under her care, the nurse is by far the most important person in the house. She lives on the fat of the land, and is never allowed to cry herself—that is to say, she must never sigh for the bantling she has left behind. Her wages range from a pound a week, and if she gets her foster child well over its teething, she receives a gold watch in addition to other perquisites. When madame’s visits do not lie in the direction of any public garden, she takes a *fiacre*, and nurse and baby have the carriage and pair to themselves. In the Tuileries Gardens, the Parc Monceau, and on the Champs Elysées, instead of nursemaids in white dresses and perambulators, we see veritable walls of these foster-mothers in spick-and-span grey alpaca circular cloaks, and close-fitting mob-caps with streamers of broad ribbon reaching to their heels. This ribbon is a special manufacture of St. Etienne, and costs ten francs a yard. It is a plaid, red denoting the nurse of a boy, blue of a girl, at least four yards being used. A right jovial time of it have these wearers of circular cloaks and ribbon costing ten francs a yard. On a par with Juliet’s immortal nurse are evidently most

of them, well-meaning, but coarse, ignorant countrywomen attracted from the poorest and least progressive parts of France by high wages and riotous living. And concerning them has lately been waged a war as determined in spirit as that waged about Captain Dreyfus. Laws have been promulgated against the practice of vicarious motherhood. One of the most popular French novelists has scathingly indicted the system in fiction; and at the eclectic Théâtre Antoine, night after night, vast audiences have been moved to tears by *Les Remplaçantes*, a play owing its inspiration to the same subject. Whether the excellent Loi Roussel forbidding mothers to go out as nurses till their own infants are seven months old, René Bazin's moving history of "Donatienne," or M. Brioux' still more moving play, *Les Remplaçantes*, will reduce that living wall in the Paris gardens is a moot question. And why fond French mothers as persistently relegate their maternal duties to others as when Rousseau issued his fulminations a hundred and fifty years ago, I have never learned.

Alike in humble ranks the baby is an idol, but oft-times a hindrance, an encumbrance, a tiny white elephant. The Loi Roussel may prohibit working women from acting the part of foster-mothers; it cannot compel them to be mothers indeed. In all the first-class Paris hotels housework is done by married couples, these being necessarily in the prime of life and the pick of their class. Whenever a baby is born to one of these chambermaids, it is immediately boarded out in the country, faring, doubtless, every whit as well as Chérubim in Paul de Kock's amusing story, and reared no more intelligently. You may still see babies *emmailloté* in the country, so swaddled that they cannot move a limb, their little unwashed heads in close-fitting caps. But out of sight is by no means a case of out of mind. From the moment of its birth the baby in France is the pivot on which everything turns, the centre of



parental hopes and ambitions. A day out means a run into the country to see Bébé. Every English half-crown bestowed by passing travellers goes towards the little daughter's dowry or the little son's equipment for life. In the Pyrenees, no sooner is a girl born than the mother begins to spin and weave her trousseau—the enormous stock of house and family linen that will long outlast the life just begun. And no sooner is a daughter born to the professional man or small functionary than her modest dowry is insured by yearly payments—a few thousand francs to become her own on her marriage day. We all know the story of Diderot, who sold his library to dower his daughter. That charming story-teller, Charles Nodier, author of "Trilby" (did du Maurier here borrow the title of his once famous book?), bookworm and bibliographer though he was, made a similar sacrifice. Tremendous, indeed, is the sense of parental responsibility in France. The care, bringing up, and providing for one child seem enough for ordinary mortals. "Ah! how happy you will be when Denise has a brother to keep her company!" I said to a gentleman of means and position who was talking rapturously of his baby granddaughter. "Another?" was the reply. "What should I do with two grandchildren? I have only one pair of arms!"

It is not for a moment to be inferred that more affection or care is lavished upon babies over the water than here. But, as Thiers remarked when France was torn to pieces by Bonapartist, Orleanist, and Legitimist factions, "A single crown cannot be worn by three heads," so the numerous occupants of an English nursery cannot all be little divinities.

A brilliant Anglo-French friend of mine was of opinion that French amiability is due to the fact of early indulgence, children's tempers never being spoiled by contradiction. Be that as it may, other characteristics must certainly be attributed to bringing up—sociableness, for instance, also

gastronomic discrimination. Whilst to the little Anglo-Saxon the populous nursery becomes a school of life, to his neighbour the *salon* and *salle à manger* become schools of manners. Nurseries and nursery meals being unknown in France, no sooner is baby weaned than he takes his place at the dinner-table, rapidly acquiring ease of manner and appreciative habits.

"Ma fille adore le poisson" ("My daughter adores fish"), one day said the proud mamma of a year-old baby to her *table d'hôte* neighbour. This happened to be an English lady, who with no little amusement was watching the infantine gourmet. Everything that French babies like is supposed to be good for them, and, as the national physique is noted for its elasticity and powers of resistance, there may be practical wisdom in thus eschewing nursery diet.

French parents, alike the rich and the poor, hold with Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre, and grandfather of the gay Gascon. No sooner was the future King of France born than the old man took him in his arms, and from a gold cup made him swallow a few drops of choice wine, in order, as chroniclers relate, to make him grow up strong and manly. French children are wine-drinkers from their infancy.

Some years since I was staying with a Frenchwoman who received boarders. One afternoon the excellent maid-of-all-work brought in my tea, looking ready to cry of vexation.

"It is unbearable!" she burst out. "Think of it, madame; nine to cook for, and in the midst of my vegetable cleaning I have to leave off and get a dinner ready for Suzanne because she is going out with her grandmother."

The grandmother, who lived near, was to fetch Made-moiselle Suzanne at half-past five. Here is the bill of fare, the young lady being just two and a half—soup, fish, beef steak, fried potatoes, cheese, dessert, and, of course, wine.

Upon another occasion I was dining with rich people living in their own hotel, and, wonderful to relate, the parents of seven children, from three to fifteen. All sat down to dinner, the younger ones being carried off to bed as soon as they nodded over their plates.

The introduction of the nursery would necessitate the entire reconstruction of Paris. In luxurious private hotels only is anything like an English installation for babies possible, whilst even in handsome flats costing several hundreds a year there are never two rooms available for the purpose. As to smaller *appartements*, the bedrooms are mere slips ; a nursery in these is every whit as out of the question as a servants' hall. One reason, perhaps, why children should be so much scarcer in Paris than in London is that in the French capital there is positively no room for more. And as the scarcity of any commodity immensely enhances its preciousness, French babies are never in the way, or supposed to be in the way.

I have heard an animated political discussion going on whilst a boy of two and a half was hammering the lid of a wooden box. No notice was taken either by his parents or their second visitor. Nor are French children ever supposed to be naughty.

I was one day walking in the country with friends when their little girl, aged three, began to fret, as children will without knowing why. "Ce n'est pas la petite Georgette qui pleure, c'est la petite Louise" ("It is not little Georgette who is crying, but little Louise"), said Georgette's father, her waywardness being thus attributed to an imaginary culprit. Another friend, a hardworking professional man, lately observed to me, "My wife and I have given up going to the theatre. Our little boy cries at the notion of being left behind, so we stay at home."

When, some years ago, the famous novelist Alphonse Daudet was in London with his wife and little girl, nothing astonished Madame Daudet so much as the fact of the

child not being invited to luncheons, dinners, and receptions.

"J'ai toujours gardé mes enfants dans ma poche" ("I have always kept my children in my pocket"), she said indignantly to an interviewer. That English parents should not do the same seemed in this lady's eyes the height of insular moroseness. As I have said, the French baby is never supposed to be in the way. The other day I was dispatching a telegram from a French terminus. The clerk was enjoying his domesticities as he worked. By his side played a boy of three, keeping him company a sage-looking dog, her puppy nursed on the master's knee. And the last time I called upon my dressmaker, near Fontainebleau, her baby, of course, was in the workroom, one apprentice after another delightedly acting the part of nurse.

Beautiful is this French adulation of infantine life. Whether excessive spoiling later on is the best preparation for after years is another matter.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GIRL

THE French girl is a very delicate piece of Nature's handiwork, art adding the final touch. On the threshold of life she may be said to form a feminine type apart. In her person is combined alike the woman of the world and, I was about to say, the blushing *ingénue*; since French girls never do blush, I omit the adjective.

Let not the correction be misinterpreted. The incapacity of these eighteen-year-old maidens is by no means due to forwardness. Quite the reverse. It is due to fastidious training, to the perpetual inculcation of restraint. A group of English sisters resembles hardy garden flowers left to sun, air, and themselves. The one daughter of a French house is like a hot-house rarity, day by day jealously nursed, ever on its growth a watchful eye, exterior influences withheld.

The methods of bringing up in the two countries differ so essentially as to render comparison impossible. Each system is antipodal to the other, and each is nicely adapted to circumstances and national ideals. In England a good deal is left to chance and natural inclination: in France, a girl's character and career are carefully elaborated. It may safely be taken for granted that a French girl, from her cradle to her marriage, is the subject of more parental anxiety, calculation, and forethought than the inmates of what Jean Paul calls a daughter-full house (*ein tochtervolles Haus*).



Education is a problem of immense difficulty and painful deliberation. The convent school no longer enjoys the prestige of former days. Madame de Maintenon's ideal of the well-bred young person has become old-fashioned. Even strictly orthodox parents now require more solidity in the matter of instruction, and more modernity in household arrangements. The young lady whose mother and grandmother were educated, or rather fitted for society, by the sisters of Sacré Cœur, no longer goes to a convent school. So after much diligent inquiry, comparing of maternal notes, and verifying of references, some private school, or, better still, some lady receiving a few daily pupils, is fixed upon; but the difficulties are far from over.

As we all know, every French girl of means and position is in precisely the condition of a royal princess. Under no circumstances whatever must she so much as cross the street to post a letter alone. One might suppose, from the Argus eye kept upon girlhood in France, that we were still living in the days of Una and her milk-white lamb! There is, however, a comfortable equilibrium between demand and supply. The necessary bodyguard of French schoolgirls is furnished by an army of *promeneuses*, literally, promenaders; in other words, gentlewomen hired by the hour, day, or week, whose business it is to conduct pupils to and from their schools, and take them for walks when required. If the minutest investigation is necessary in the case of an educational establishment, how doubly is it needed in the case of a young daughter's companion! The *promeneuse* must neither be too old nor too young, neither too well-dressed nor too shabby; her appearance, indeed, must be irreproachable, and her conversation and manners to match. And not only herself, but her acquaintances and connections generally! If there is a blot on her family escutcheon, no needy spinster or widow would be accepted in this capacity. In a relentless spirit



are domestic records studied throughout France. With equal painstaking are chosen companions, books, and amusements. All these an English girl selects for herself; quite otherwise is it with her young neighbour over the water. So long as she remains under the parental roof, she accepts such guidance as a matter of course. To invite a school-fellow to the house without first asking permission, to take up a book before consulting her mother as to its suitability, would never enter her head. If we want to learn how young French girls are entertained on birthdays and holidays, we must attend afternoon performances at the Théâtre Français or the Odéon. There witnessing *L'ami Fritz*, *Athalie*, or some other equally unobjectionable piece, may be seen dozens of proud papas with their youthful daughters, and delightful it is to witness what pains are taken for their amusement and instruction. In the mean time an educational course is being carried on, somewhat restricted in scope, but thorough as far as it goes. French parents—wisely, it seems to me—limit studies to taste, capacity, and circumstances. The entire girlhood of France is not taught violin-playing, to the terror of the community at large, simply because violin-playing has become the fashion. Even in the lycée, answering in some degree to our high schools, thoroughness rather than comprehensiveness is the object held in view. A girl learns few things, but those things well.

We are here, however, not dealing with a young lady who will have to go out into the world and earn her own living, but one who is destined for society and the ordering of a well-appointed house. In her case the programme will be naturally curtailed. She need not learn book-keeping or needlework in its more practical branches. English has long been obligatory as a part of genteel education; music a French girl generally learns if she cares about it; and there is one very pretty accomplishment peculiarly French, in which she often excels. This

is the graceful art of declamation. Family gatherings are enlivened by the young daughter of the house reciting a "Les Étoiles" of Lamartine, "La dernière leçon de Français" of Daudet, or some other little classic in prose or verse. And a talent of this kind is carefully fostered for use in after life, not laid aside, as is so often the case with the pencil and the keyboard. The essential education of the French girl, however, does not rest with masters and mistresses, but with her mother, and is sedulously, unremittingly carried on in the home. It is an education wholly apart from books, or a training of eye and ear. Its object is neither pedagogic nor didactic, but social. The pupil is to be trained for society, the world, and, above all, for her future position as wife, mother, mistress. Thus it comes about that the French girl can never be found fault with as regards carriage, manners, or modes of expressing her thoughts. Everything she does is done in the most approved fashion. Let it not be hence inferred that she necessarily grows up artificial or mannered. Habit soon usurps the place of nature, and if less spontaneous than her English sister, it is because she has been taught from childhood upwards to control her impulses and weigh her words—in short, to remember that she belongs to a highly polished society, and its consequent responsibilities. "There is a very good word," wrote Swift, "and that is, moderation." This very good word has a more subtle meaning in its French equivalent, *la mesure*. *La mesure*, moderation, proportion, a sense of the fitness of things, is ever in the French mind. Just as in French cookery the rule is that no single flavour should predominate, so a happy medium is aimed at in the education of girls. And the importance attached to little things by their monitresses induces the same attitude in themselves. An untidy scrawl in the shape of a letter, a blundering speech, an awkward posture, a too loud laugh are all eliminated by teaching and example. As an instance of the perfection

attained by Frenchwomen in small matters, take the following story.

An elegant and accomplished young Parisian lady was lately the guest at an Australian Government House. Among mademoiselle's gifts commented upon in society papers was the consummate grace with which she entered a carriage! The trifling incident is highly suggestive. One element is ruthlessly excluded from a French girl's education. From girlhood to adolescence she grows up without sentimentality to be an eminently matter-of-fact, a strictly reasonable being. The great romances of France are sealed books to her till she dons the wedding-ring; George Sand, Balzac, Victor Hugo are so many names. If indeed any novels have come in her way, they are the *romans pour jeunes filles*—i.e. romances expressly written for young girls, not namby-pamby, good-goody, after the manner of "The Heir of Redclyffe," or "John Halifax," but dealing with the mildest love-making only, a drop of essence in a bucket of water.

It is only the title of Madame that authorizes her to take up "Eugénie Grandet," "Le Marquis de Villemer," or "Nôtre Dame de Paris."

A French acquaintance recently expatiated to me on her daughter's newly-awakened enthusiasm for fiction, the said daughter having been just married at the age of thirty-two! "Of course, Jane" (the English Jane sounds so much prettier in French ears than their own Jeanne) "can now read anything, and she is devouring Victor Hugo's works, which she gets from a circulating library."

In a French journal lately appeared the bitter cry of "an old maid of thirty." It seems mighty hard, wrote this victim of custom and prejudice, that whilst minxes of eighteen or twenty, just because they were married, could read what they chose, and run about unattended, she was still treated as a schoolgirl.

Fortunately, French "old maids of thirty" are not

common in the upper and well-to-do ranks, and those belonging to a different sphere are generally too much occupied for romance-reading.

Thus education has nicely adapted a French girl for that parental interference with her love affairs—if, indeed, they can be so termed—which to insular notions appears unintelligible, if not shocking. A very pretty American girl of twenty once told me that from her twelfth year she had never been without hangers-on. In France flirting is geographically limited. Under no circumstances is it permitted in good society. A French girl learns to look at marriage through the maternal eyes. She calmly contemplates the matter from various points of view—in the French tongue, *elle envisage la question*.

Indoctrinated with sound practical principles, with a horror of the incongruous, the disturbing element in domestic life, of retrogression in the social scale, of any approach to a misalliance, she seldom disputes the parental view. The partner decided for her is accepted. That word "partner" suggests a train of reflections. Marriage in France is so strictly a partnership in the material as well as moral sense that a bridal pair is at once called a young household (*un jeune ménage*). And if fathers and mothers have given anxious days and sleepless nights to the selection of *promeneuses*, schools, books, and companions, what thought and deliberation will not be bestowed upon the choice of a son-in-law! Unsuitable or objectionable suitors are summarily dismissed or kept out of the way, a likely admirer is encouraged to come forward. And as a French girl, unlike her Transatlantic sister, has not had a succession of sweethearts from her twelfth year, she is disposed to look favourably on the first that presents himself. Under such circumstances may there not be as much chance of happiness and comfort in these marriages as in the happy-go-lucky wedlock English maidens so often enter upon of their own accord? The



tree must be judged by its fruits. Where do we find closer unions, tenderer wives, more devoted husbands than in France? Where the system of the *mariage de convenance* proves a fiasco we often find parental adulation to blame, the spoiling of character by over-indulgence in childhood, the development of egotism and wilfulness by inordinate fondling from the cradle upwards. Such cases are, fortunately, not the rule, but the exception.

*Fiançailles*, or betrothals, are quickly followed by the marriage ceremony in France. Long engagements, after English fashion, would never be tolerated by either family of the betrothed pair. Here, again, we touch upon the supremely practical side of French social life. Engagements are not contemplated till the future head of a house is in a position to marry—I should more properly put it, till the fortune on both sides admits of an adequate settling down.

Of varied and immense aptitudes—already a woman of the world, though, as far as the other sex is concerned reared with comparatively cloistral reserve, the French girl awaits fate in the shape of wifhood and maternity ; other ambitions has she none, or, at least, other aspirations are subservient to these. Strange it is, but true ! In the oldest civilization of Western Europe, in what is still, intellectually speaking, the most splendid civilization in the world, tradition has withstood time and change, revolution and democratic progress ; old-world standards retain their place, old-world types are held in highest honour. The Frenchwoman's ideal is still the quiet place "behind the heads of children ;" the ideal Frenchwoman is still the wife and mother.

Feminine clubland as existing in America ; the gradual evolution in that country of what may be called an asexual community to the destruction of family life ; Anglo-Saxon activity (may we not add unrest ?) impelling English girls of means to become doctors, army nurses, head gardeners,

any and every thing that takes them from home and affords independence—these elements do not as yet leaven French society. Woman doctors, even Portias wearing the advocate's robe, we certainly hear of, and naturally an army of women educators and other workers exist. But the career is entered upon from the necessity of earning a livelihood, or from an especial sense of vocation, not because home-life is distasteful or because restrictions of any kind are unbearable. As a natural consequence, in France womanhood reigns with undivided domestic sway. The head of a house is not the master, but the mistress. In the least little particular a husband consults—is bound to consult—his wife, here material interests cementing conjugal union. The undowered, the penniless bride is next door to non-existent in France. From the top-most rung of the social ladder to the lowest, a household is set up by contracting parties of equal, or nearly equal, fortune. Hence the dignified position of a wife, hence the closely allied interests necessitating mutual counsel and advice.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOY

A FEW years ago the lycée or public school was drastically arraigned by that popular novelist M. Jean Aicard. Again and again through the picturesque and moving pages of "*L'Ame d'un Enfant*," we come upon Sully Prudhomme's line—

"Oh, mères, coupables absentes!"

"Oh, mothers, guilty absentees!" he writes, "fain would I have these lines engraved on the portal of every lycée. For why play with words? The lycée is a prison, substantially a prison, the horrors of which are aggravated by the innocence and helplessness of the prisoners. Children are therein subjected to penal servitude, a system based, not upon love, but upon compulsion and routine."

If M. Jean Aicard indicts the feminine rather than the paternal head of a house, we must remember that in the home a Frenchwoman's rule is autocratic. A child's education is entirely in the hands of its mother, and—so writes our author—as soon as little Pierre or Paul begin to be noisy, to damage furniture, and need the discipline their fathers have not been permitted to exercise at home, off they are bundled to a lycée. Of the seven or eight hundred boarders in any one of these barrack-like buildings, many, he asserts, belong to families living in the same town.

Throwing what reads like personal experiences into narrative form, our author describes the life of a little boarder. *Oliver Twist* seems hardly more to be pitied than this nine-year-old victim of militarism in education, but no mere autobiography is here, a child's soul is laid bare. From beginning to end the book is a condemnation of scholastic methods in France.

In his little read but deeply interesting memoirs, Philarète Chasles tells us of George Sand's dismay when visiting her son in a lycée. The bare yard doing duty as a recreation ground, the prison-like uniformity of the class-rooms, the military discipline shocked the novelist, and, adds the narrator, "I am entirely at one with George Sand, Montaigne, and H. Fröbel, I protest against those dismal jails for schoolboys."

Montaigne's great predecessor in Gargantua sketched an ideal plan of education. Rabelais would have a collegiate life "so easy and delectable as rather to resemble royal pastime than scholastic drudgery."

But Rabelais and Montaigne were voices preaching in the wilderness. That arch centralizer Napoleon worsened instead of bettering matters. Under his *régime* the lycée became half monastery, half barracks, an apprenticeship to military life. Professors, principals, and managers were bachelors; a semi-military uniform was obligatory even in the case of nine-year-old boys, like soldiers, pupils were summoned to meals, lessons, and exercise by the drum.

The Restoration only altered matters extrinsically. The name of *collège royal* supplemented that of lycée, bells replaced the perpetual drumming so offensive to George Sand, and the Napoleonic three-cornered hat was exchanged for one of less military kind.

Some valuable reforms and many important changes were introduced under the second Empire by M. Duruy the historian, then minister of public instruction. Lycées were henceforth divided into two categories, those intended for





GYMNASTIC FÊTE AT PONS (SAINTONGE)

the learned professions, and those about to devote themselves to commerce and agriculture. The first followed the usual curriculum ; the second studied modern languages, technical science, agriculture, chemistry, and the like. Certain lycées were set apart for the new course of study called *l'enseignement spécial*.

The third Republic not only revolutionized primary education throughout France, carrying out the magnificent scheme of the Convention and founding state schools for girls, but introduced a new spirit into the lycée generally. The Ferry laws of 1881 considerably reduced the time hitherto devoted to dead languages ; German, English, and elementary science were now taught in the lower classes. The so-called *enseignement spécial* was also modified.

How far were such changes from satisfying public opinion the Government commission of inquiry of 1899 makes clear. Five enormous volumes contained the reports of *savants*, professors, delegates of agricultural and industrial associations, and others.

Here is an extract from that of M. Lavissee, the historian—

“The uniformity of school routine is ludicrous. How inconsistent, for instance, that the hours of recreation should be timed in different climates at precisely the same time ! From one to two o'clock in the south of France, the heat of summer quite prevents pupils from taking exercise, but the same rules are in force for Marseilles and Dunkirk.”

One result of the five enormous volumes has been the introduction of athletic sports into the lycée. Cricket, football, and other games are fast supplanting the “walk and talk” of former days.

“How do you amuse yourselves during recreation hours ?” I once asked the inmate of a large lycée.

“We walk up and down and talk,” was the reply.



Whilst approving a certain amount of physical development, the President of the Commission, M. Ribot, deprecated the wholesale adoption of English methods.

"We do not want," he wrote, "to turn our lads into English boys. Rough sports do not suit our race, more refined in its elegant vigour (*vigueur élégante*) than that of the Anglo-Saxon."

Hygienic conditions have also improved. We even hear that the much-hated *pion*, or superintendent of tasks and recreation yard, is to be suppressed. The herding together of enormous numbers, the complete absence of any approach to home life and of feminine influence, the deadening military routine, are time-honoured abuses not easily combated. I must, however, say that my first visit to one of these great colleges gave me a very pleasant impression.

It was on a beautiful Thursday in September that I drove with friends from the heart of Paris to the lycée of Vanves, half a dozen miles off.

As we passed through the porter's gate into the magnificent park, now an animated scene, I said to myself, "How happy must young Parisians be with such a playground, acres upon acres of undulating woodland, almost another Bois de Boulogne, at their service in play hours!"

I was soon undeceived. When I congratulated my young friend Edmund upon such a privilege, he smiled at my *naïveté*.

"We are never allowed here except once a month, when our parents and friends come to see us," he replied. "Our recreation ground is the yard (*cour*) yonder."

The said *cour* was, however, invisible, being on the other side of the lycée, formerly a seignorial château.

To-day the beautiful grounds presented the appearance of a vast picnic. Fond mothers and fathers had brought baskets of cakes, fruit, and sweets, and everywhere bivouacked happy groups.



Little wonder that these boys clung so tenaciously to mothers, sisters, any feminine relation. The lycée as absolutely excludes womankind as the monastery and the barracks. Except on the Thursday half-holiday, a lycéen never sees a woman's face or hears a woman's voice. Tiny boys of nine and upwards are straightway committed to masculine governance and care.

The following illustration of a little lycéen's life is from M. Aicard's book:—

"One half-holiday, I had brought back a rose, and, wishing to keep it as long as possible, I put it in a glass of water inside my desk.

"I could not help from time to time looking at my treasure—a crime, I admit. For roses speak, but not in Latin; they say all sorts of forbidden things, they invite little boys to run about in country lanes, they incite to rebellion. You never see a lycéen *censeur* (overseer or supervisor of studies) sniff a flower. Flowers do not bloom on the schoolmaster's ruler. Well, I harboured my rose, just as an anarchist harbours his bomb. When I opened my desk to give the poor flower air, a ray of sunshine bathed it, seemed to kiss it;—a dark shadow suddenly blotted out the beam. A big hand seized my splendid rose, in another second it lay in the courtyard below. Justice was satisfied!"

A state system of education is not easily changed, but outside the French University and its dependencies, voluntarism is actively at work.

Our good friend, M. Demolins, author of "*La Supériorité des Anglo-Saxons*," does not share M. Ribot's misgivings. He is not aghast at the notion of French boys losing their *vigueur élégante*—in other words, becoming too English.

Aided by a valiant band of co-operators, this indefatigable Anglophile has boldly seized the bull by the horns. From the *École des Roches*, Verneuil (Eure), every vestige of the lycée is banished. Here are no

enormous dormitories with spy-holes in the doors, no prison-like routine, no walks and talks up and down bare yards. Outdoor sports, occupations, and excursions in summer, social evenings in winter, vary the scholastic year, whilst an element of family life enters both into upper and preparatory schools. Little wonder that when the boys separated after the first term, *i.e.* Christmas 1899, they gave three cheers for M. Demolins, and exclaimed how delighted they should all be to return.

Whilst the primary object of this great educational reformer and his colleagues is a sound physical, moral, and mental training, equally important is their secondary aim, namely, to make each pupil not only a good citizen, but a citizen of the world—in the best sense of the word, to de-nationalize him. M. Demolins' scheme and organization tend to nothing more surely than the uprooting of national prejudice. One feature of his school is the six months' *stagiaire*, or residence abroad. The youths are sent into English or German families or to schools, not only for linguistic opportunities, but in order to familiarize them with modes of life among other nations. Here indeed the originator of the *École Nouvelle* shows an insight and political prescience that entitle him to universal gratitude. English and German professors are also engaged in contradistinction to the lycéen system. After the Franco-German war, a regulation was made totally excluding foreigners from the public teaching staff. Hence lycéens could only learn foreign languages at second hand, an immense disadvantage. In the Jesuit colleges, on the contrary, M. Demolins' arrangement has been generally followed. On the subject of language Michelet wrote eloquently, "How many unhappy beings lost their lives during the Hundred Years' War simply because they could not cry 'Mercy' in the tongue of the foe! In later times, how many European conflicts, especially between near neighbours, might have been

averted but for common prejudices and ill-founded antipathies!"

A first step to destroy these is the internationalization of school life, and M. Demolins' experiment so far has proved strikingly successful. Take, by way of example, the following extracts from French boys in England: "Chère Madame," writes a thirteen-year-old to the founder's wife, "I write to thank you and M. D—— for having sent me to Dulwich, for every one is most kind to me, and I am not at all sad." Another boy aged twelve writes, "My brother and I are quite well. We are four in one bedroom; one boy is an Australian, who is very nice (*très gentil*), the other English and very amusing." A third aged eleven, who had evidently crossed the Manche in fear and trembling, wrote, "The English boys here are not at all what I expected to find them, noisy and rough; one of them especially I am very fond of."

And so on and so throughout the collection included in the half-yearly report ending October, 1900.

"Only think," M. Demolins observed to me when lunching at Verneuil, "my boy has become so English that he did not want to come home at all, and actually relishes porridge for breakfast!"

Delightful indeed is a day spent amid such surroundings, on every side evidence of Utopian dreams put into practice.

"My master whipt me very well," quoth Dr. Johnson to his friend Langton; "without that, sir, I should have done nothing." Wiser far is the Rabelaisian theory of a scholastic training *doux légier et délectable*, a theory carried out in particular at Les Roches.

M. Demolins has, of course, driven a very thin edge of the wedge only into the colossal educational machinery put together by the Jesuits and elaborated by Napoleon.

Expenses are necessarily higher. A hundred or two boys located after English fashion with married professors

cost more per head than four or five times as many herded together in barracks.

Again, there is the prejudice against innovation to combat, the mistrust of novelty and of foreign methods. Doubtless many parents do not share M. Demolins' enthusiasm for the cold bath ; some with M. Ribot would fear lest football overmuch might rob their sons of native *vigueur élégante* ; others, again, would consider the discipline insufficient.

Be this as it may, the *École nouvelle* alike as a theory and a fact flourishes amazingly. Since my visit to Verneuil just six years ago, a congeries of handsome buildings has sprung up around the original schoolhouse, many acres of recreation ground have been added to the former area, and every year pupils are refused for want of accommodation.

In my account of the Lycée Fénelon for girls, I advert on the absence of foreign teachers for their respective languages. This protective system is happily doomed. The papers recently announced that our Board of Education has been approached by the French Government on the subject of young English schoolmasters who would give two hours' daily conversation in return for board and lodging in the lycées or other institutions receiving them. Doubtless the same innovation will ere long be introduced into the lycée for girls.

I will now say something about the French schoolboy as I have found him. One marked characteristic distinguishes him from his English compeer. The French boy is a conversationalist, the other is not.

A facile tongue is encouraged in France from the cradle upwards. The one child or the only son, invariably present at the family board, will naturally have more opportunities of expressing his opinions than one of six or seven. At an age when our own boys and girls are set down to nursery or schoolroom meals with nurse or



governess, French children join their parents in the dining-room. Thus social habits are prematurely formed; the walks and talks of the lycée further develop conversational powers. At the age of eighteen, often earlier, a well-educated French youth can intelligently discuss widely divergent subjects; he has become a more sociable being, more generally companionable, than an English stripling, is more addicted to books and indoor life, above all, to reflection.

National systems of education have contributed to this result. By the time Étonians go to Oxford or Cambridge many young Frenchmen are already bachelors of art, science, or letters. Minors before the law, from an intellectual point of view they have attained their majority. Excellent company are often these youthful students, love of conversation, relish of society and domesticities, accentuated by the barrack-like lycée and the hated barrack life in earnest to come.

Serviceableness and a desire to oblige I should set down as characteristics of the French boy.

I well remember several instances in point.

Upon one occasion I was staying with Burgundian friends at the pretty little inland spa of St. Honoré les Bains. Among my casual acquaintances was a family belonging to the humbler middle classes, consisting of parents and three children, a girl and two boys, whose ages ranged from eleven to fourteen or thereabouts. We often took long walks together, and one day I asked my friend Paul, the elder boy, to tell us a story. Without hesitation, and in clear, well-put-together sentences, he epitomized Hector Malot's popular novel, "En Famille."

Upon another occasion I spent the best part of a very wet week with friends near Is-sur-Tille, in the Côte d'Or. My hosts were not reading people, but the eighteen-year-old son of the house had lately brought some new novels from Dijon, and very good naturedly volunteered to read

them aloud. From morning till night the rain poured down. It was quite impossible for his grandmother and myself to stir abroad, but never for a moment did he relax his efforts on our behalf. And when the stories were got through, he took me upstairs, where I found an excellent library of French classics, not a volume of which apparently had been touched for years. As the rain continued the reading went on, Gresset's inimitable "Vert-Vert," among other favourite pieces, being given with the same untiring alacrity.

Such incidents may appear trifling, but they are none the less indicative of character. The French boy has his faults as well as any other. His virtues are eminently social, the fostering of inherited inclinations and aptitudes. And his *mentalité*—to use here a French word hardly translatable—his intellectual attitude, is what we should naturally expect; that is to say, eclectic, critical, analytic, addicted, perhaps overmuch, to logic and reasoning.

"My boy" (the child in question was between ten and eleven) "must always reason about everything," I once heard a French mother say. "Whatever he has to do must first be reasoned about."

A habit, of course, checked at the lycée and in the barracks, but which, nevertheless, remains a habit through life.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONSCRIPTS

SOME time since I was leaving a country house near Troyes, in Champagne, when my hostess observed, "I should have insisted on keeping you longer, but for the next twenty-eight days we shall be without coachman and butler, both having to serve in the manœuvres." With a smile she added, "The pair travel to Dijon by the same train as yourself, and a substitute will drive us to the station, a man formerly in our employ. I was much amused just now by his request that he might retain his moustaches ; he should not like, he said, to have to take them off. Naturally, I humoured him."

It may seem odd that sumptuary laws should exist in a republic. So it is, and, as I shall show elsewhere, in many respects our neighbours are far more aristocratic than ourselves.

I was awaited by a friend at Dijon, so, finding that they could be of no use to me, the two middle-aged conscripts took leave, looking anything but elate. Both were married men, fathers of families, and occupying places of trust. This recurring interference with daily life, the indescribable fatigues and discomforts of manœuvres under a burning August sun, the physical and mental risks daily involved, might well sober their usually cheerful countenances. How many a man in his prime and in splendid health sets off for his *vingt-huit jours* never to return alive ! Sunstroke, dysentery, accidents, excessive fatigue, exact an

annual toll. From his majority until the attainment of his forty-fifth year, a Frenchman is subject to this quadrennial ordeal.

No one, indeed, who has not lived in France and among French people can have the faintest idea of what conscription really means alike to the individual, the family, and the home. Nor do we here fully realize the import of that fell term "armed peace." It may not be generally known that the high-stepper of the rich and the cart-horse of the poor in France are only up to a certain point the property of their owners. Every year possessors of horses have to furnish the Ministry of War with a list of their animals, one and all being liable to requisition in case of war. Indemnification would be made, but what payment could compensate for the loss of much-prized favourites? Chevaline conscription was regulated by laws of July, 1873, and of August, 1874. Mules and vehicles are also in this sense subject to the State.

As I shall show further on, even under the modified military code of the Third Republic, the blood-tax falls heaviest on those least able to bear it—namely, on the artisan, the peasant farmer, and the labouring man. Young men able to pass certain examinations are let off with one year's service, the result being that a very small proportion indeed of the better-off ranks spend three years in barracks. But what twelve months of compulsory soldiering is like, in many cases hardships being mitigated by easy circumstances, the following pages will make clear.

From the day of enrolment to that of his discharge the conscript finds himself a prisoner, the conviction being first brought home to him by the matter of clothes. The enormous army stores, thousands—nay, tens, hundreds, thousands of thousands of *képis*, tunics, trousers, boots, warehoused in every garrison town are resorted to with due parsimony. In every department of military administration the rule is one of strictest, the most rigid thrift.





CONSCRIPTS

Thus on entering the barracks a conscript is not rigged out with a new uniform. He is often obliged to take a predecessor's leavings, pantaloons not being so much as relined for the next wearer. Hence the excessive supervision of dress, the punishments inflicted for grease-stains, a rent, or the loss of a button!

Next to the discomfort of ill-fitting, unsuitable, possibly left-off clothes, is that of sleeping accommodation. Imagine the first night in barracks of a youth not luxuriously but comfortably, or we will say decently, brought up. He shares a huge, bare dormitory with fifty or more conscripts severally belonging to the lowest as well as the most favoured ranks of society. The pallet next his own may be occupied by one of the unclassed, some rowdy or vagabond, on the other side he may have a hard-working but coarse-mannered countryman. Absolute cleanliness is next to impossible in these military caravansaries; in winter the men suffer from cold, in summer from heat, flies, fleas, and worse nuisances. Intense fatigue will at times fail to induce sleep under such circumstances.

Next comes the question of diet. Such minute attention is paid to cookery by all classes in France that here, perhaps, the artisan and the peasant suffer hardly less than the dandy. "A soldier can eat anything," once observed a gentleman-conscript to me. What he meant to say was, not that he could always relish barrack fare, but that he could satisfy his hunger with the first dish put in his way. The *gamelle*, or mess partaken of after the manner of the loving-cup, was abolished some years since; each man now has a plate or bowl to himself. It is the monotony that tries the healthiest appetite, a perpetual round of stewed meat and vegetables, no wine being allowed except during the manœuvres.

But the crowning privation is that of liberty. Unseemly clothes, crowded, malodorous, noisy sleeping-quarters, *ragoût* washed down with water from January to December, are

bagatelles compared to the sense of moral degradation, the fact of being reduced to an automaton. Let me here give a conscript's own views on the subject, the speaker, as I shall show later, having enjoyed many alleviations.

"Well," I began, "my dear Émile"—I had known my informant from a boy—"now that your garrison experiences are over, tell me what you think of conscription. And what I should much like to know is this: was the probation harder or more bearable than you had been led to expect?"

"Harder, much harder," was the unhesitating reply. "No one except those who have gone through it have the remotest idea of what conscription is like. As I had passed certain examinations entitling me to a remission of two of the three years' obligatory service, and as I had money at my disposal, I consider myself exceptionally favoured. For all that, barrack life to a civilian is a hideous nightmare. There is no other name for it. You feel as if you were shut up in prison to the end of your days. Many young men cannot stand the confinement and run away. This is a desperate step. If they succeed in crossing the frontier, they remain outlaws till they have passed their forty-fifth year. If they are caught or return voluntarily, they are most probably drafted into what is called the regiment of intractables, and despatched to Algeria. The treatment they are there subjected to is very severe. You see, commanding officers are apt to become hard and unsympathetic in spite of their better nature. In the German army matters are much worse; here they are bad enough, goodness knows."

"Then your experience is that conscription does not tend to make young men more patriotic, nor to imbue them with the military spirit?"

"Patriotic, indeed!" he replied; "instead, conscription turns them into Socialists and Anarchists. The German army, as you know, reeks with Socialism, and there is



plenty of it in our own. As to enforced military service inclining men to soldiering, on the contrary it makes them loathe it. I, for one, am all for disarmament and arbitration. Nothing on earth, for instance, would ever induce me to witness a review. Outsiders have no notion of the sufferings thereby entailed on the men."

"Anyhow, Émile, you must have learned a good deal during the past twelve months?" I asked.

My young friend's answer was of the briefest. I should here explain that he was no sybarite or victim of too soft bringing-up. An accomplished horseman, an excellent shot, a skilled fencer, accustomed to the life of a country gentleman, in his case the elementary training of a soldier would be child's play, and physical hardships would be borne philosophically. Yet it seemed strange that these experiences should have begun and ended with repugnance only, nothing being left to recall with satisfaction. What he had really found intolerable was the loss of individuality, the derogation of manhood, the extinguisher put upon all that makes life inspiriting and elevating. And again Émile reverted to the deterioration of character brought about by militarism.

"Of course we are not cuffed, buffeted, and kicked as in Germany—no French officer is allowed to touch a man; nevertheless, conscription as a system is both brutalizing and demoralizing." Then, he added, as we strolled along the Champs Elysées on the day following his discharge, "Am I really free? Have I shaken off the fell dream? I do not yet feel quite sure."

On the subject of promiscuity my young friend spoke with less bitterness.

"Poor fellows!" he said, alluding to the impecunious of his brothers-in-arms. "How grateful they were when able to earn a few francs by brushing my clothes or rendering any other little service! And one night in winter when I had a bad fit of coughing, my nearest neighbour, a Breton

peasant lad, took the warm rug from his own bed, and without a word put it on my own. These things one never forgets."

Not all conscripts regard their probation in the same light. Young men of refined tastes naturally resent many things that would not shock a herdsman or carter. The cavalry regiment has often a fascination for city-bred youths, whose only experience of horsemanship has, perhaps, been a turn on the merry-go-round. And many a stripling comes out of the ordeal sturdier, more of a man, than when he first shouldered a gun. But of all the conscripts I have known, and several I have known very intimately indeed, not one ever expressed any enthusiasm for the system, or regarded barrack life as a school of patriotism.

Here a few words on the existing laws relating to conscription will not be inopportune. Irrespective of financial and material considerations, a modification is imperatively called for by conscientious reasons. Two years' service obligatory on one and all will remove a grave injustice. As I have pointed out, under existing rules, whilst the artisan, the peasant, and the day labourer give three best years of their lives to their country, the wealthy and professional classes get off with one, certain commercial and literary examinations procuring the deduction. With the rural and trading-classes such a privilege is unattainable; hence, whilst young men compelled to work for a livelihood, and oftentimes the mainstay of a family, lose three years, those who could best afford such an interference with their avocations sacrifice one only. Never by any chance do you hear of a young gentleman serving the entire term. A more equable, more democratic measure is necessary to the very existence of the Republic.

"Examinations have even been made easier," writes M. Demolins (*A-t-on intérêt à s'emparer du pouvoir*), "in order that a greater number of students may obtain the

two years' remission." Examiners have sons, and the paternal prevails over the military school. In appearance the military regulations of 1889 were framed on strictly democratic principles. As a friend wrote to me in 1890, himself being an officer retired on half-pay, "To sum up, the new law is as democratic as possible; the principle of equality has been guaranteed." Had this good friend lived a few years longer he would have seen but too good reason to change his opinion.

Until 1872 the organization of the French army was in accordance with that of 1832. Lots were drawn yearly, the highest number entitling the drawer to total exemption, the lowest to seven years' service. Certain exceptions were made in the case of only sons of widows, seminarists, professors, and teachers pledged to ten years' public service, and others. In all cases, total exemption could be purchased, the agents transacting such substitutions being called *marchands d'hommes* ("dealers in men"). After the reverses of 1870-71 military organization in France was reconstructed upon the Prussian system. Every Frenchman, with very few exceptions, then became a soldier, his obligation being that of five years' service and liability to being called up during fifteen years further in case of war. Exemption was still accorded in times of peace to elder or only sons of widows, seminarists, and Protestant theological students. Young men having passed certain examinations could purchase a four years' remission on payment of two thousand five hundred francs. These so-called *volontaires d'un an* formed a special class; they might, indeed, be called the spoiled children of the army. They were subject to a modified treatment in barracks, which provoked jealousy and the necessity for further reforms.

The law of 1889 introduced, if not absolute, what at that time seemed the nearest approach possible to absolute equality. Every French citizen was now nominally liable to three years' service, and to be called up for exercise or

during war until his forty-fifth year. No payment under any circumstances whatever can secure a substitute, the exceptions being as follows—young men under an engagement to serve ten years in educational or philanthropic institutions either in France or the colonies, students who have passed the higher examinations in art, science, or letters, who have received diplomas in national schools of agriculture and in technical schools, or who are preparing for the Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish ministry; lastly, a certain number of artisans selected by a jury of their respective departments, engravers, modellers, decorators, etc. In all these cases the three years' service is reduced to one.

Thus it will be seen that the new law—namely, an obligation of two years' service on all citizens of age indiscriminately, is not only a matter of financial economy, it is a rectification of very grave abuses.

There are also other and very grave reasons for a change. It is found that the long term of three years' withdrawal from rural life and sojourn in towns is a great factor in the depopulation of agricultural regions. Young countrymen, whether peasants or belonging to the middle classes, once this term of service is expired, have no desire to return to village life, hence the excessive competition for the humblest administrative posts and the dearth of hands for farm labour. A recent writer in the *Revue des deux Mondes* (December, 1904) puts this point very forcibly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BRIDES AND BRIDEGROOMS

"THE truth is, I have no time to get married," was the reply of a hard-worked French officer to an English friend rallying him on the subject of his old-bachelorhood.

The retort was no mere pleasantry. In England, alike from the humblest to the highest, the business of getting married may be reduced to a minimum of time, deliberation, and expense. In the case of the wealthy, a few pencilled instructions to the family lawyer as to marriage settlements and a special licence are all the formularies absolutely necessary; in the case of the middle classes, the brief church service and an equally brief reception of friends and relations afterwards entail comparatively little outlay, mental or material, on either side.

In France wedlock is no mere individual, but a family matter, a kind of joint-stock affair. An Englishman marries a wife. A Frenchman takes not only his bride for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, but her entire kith and kin, fortunately a far less numerous contingent than with us. A British matron, when informing acquaintances of her daughter's marriage, says, "We have lost our daughter." A French mother, in similar case, frames her piece of news thus, "We have gained a son." The former writes or speaks of "our daughter and her husband," or "our son and his wife," the latter in either case of "our children." A son-in-law addresses his wife's mother as "my mother," or more familiarly "mamma."



A still more striking instance of what may be called clanship in France is afforded by the black-bordered *faire part*, or announcement of decease. This notification is made not only in the name of next of kin on both sides, but of every member of both families down to babies in arms. With ourselves such a list would often fill a column of a newspaper. French families are small, and one side of a page of letter-paper more than suffices. The Roman *gens* was not a more compact and tightly knit body of society than the allied group in France, the bond having, like most things, an advantageous and a reverse side. It is often taken for granted here that youths and maidens are paired for life on the other side of the Manche as unceremoniously as for a waltz or quadrille. Nothing can be a greater mistake, and here, as in most intricacies of domestic life among our neighbours, we must take the Code Civil into account. Paternal authority is far from being a dead letter after majority, as with ourselves. Since June, 1896, marriage laws have been modified with a considerable diminution of such authority. At the present time sons and daughters aged respectively twenty-five and twenty-one, in case of parental refusal, need only make one what is called *sommation respectueuse*, or extra-judicial remonstrance, instead of three as was formerly the case. Should the parents prove obdurate, young people having attained their majority and complied with this formality, are at liberty to marry whom they please.

These modifications have had in view the facilitating of marriage generally. The same may be said of the laws relating to natural children, noticed elsewhere.

This power being placed in the hands of doting fathers and mothers, they are hardly likely to use it amiss. Instead of marrying their children against their will, they contrive to prevent them from marrying against their own ; so, at least, I should put it. Match-making in France is a very delicate process of elimination. Undesirable social elements







THE FIRST COMMUNION

are shut out. The young girl emerging from her almost cloistered seclusion, the stripling having passed his *baccalauréat* and his military service, will be thrown in the way of desirable partners, and of desirable partners only. Balzac, that encyclopædic delineator of French life, has hit off this subject in a sentence. "Love never entered into her calculations," he writes of a fond mother arranging her only son's marriage in "Béatrix." But as at such susceptible age falling in love, or what takes the place of it, is excessively easy, betrothals oftentimes appear quite voluntary, an arrangement brought about, as in England, by the young people themselves.

Nothing like the free-and-easy intercourse of boys and girls, young men and maidens, enjoyed by Anglo-Saxons, is permissible in France, in this respect the most eclectic, least democratic country existing.

But dances in the winter, croquet and garden-parties, both of English introduction, in summer, afford opportunities of acquaintance. The seaside or inland resort, too, is a fruitful field for maternal match-making. Two mothers who have taken their first communion in company, often a lifelong tie with Frenchwomen, will arrange to spend the summer holidays by the seaside in order that their sons and daughters may be thrown together. And when they return home the usual printed notice will be sent out on both sides: "Monsieur and Madame A—— have the honour to inform Monsieur and Madame B—— of the betrothal of their daughter Berthe with Monsieur Marcel C——," and so on.

In cases where prior acquaintance has afforded no guarantee of a young man's character and habits, advances on his part will not be accepted till inquiry, or rather the most scrupulous investigation, has proved satisfactory. Bachelors emancipated from parental authority are often married through the friendly mediation of acquaintances. I was one day at a picnic consisting of a dozen families

near Besançon, the said families numbering husband, wife, and one child.

"Do you see that young lady in pink, beside her wet nurse and baby?" my companion said to me. "Her marriage to Professor T—— was arranged by friends of mine. After the first introduction he declared that no, nothing on earth would induce him to marry a girl with such a nose; she has a very long nose, certainly. But on further knowledge he found her agreeable and accomplished, and now they are as happy as possible."

This is a typical story. But, of course, drawbacks more formidable than a nose *à la* Cyrano de Bergerac will sometimes confront a would-be suitor.

The wisest and fondest parental foresight cannot prevent discord arising from unsuitability of temperament and character; by these precautions misunderstandings arising from pecuniary disillusion and disappointments can entirely be avoided. Here every particular is minutely gone into before the trousseau and wedding day are so much as mooted.

The word "courtship" has no equivalent in the French tongue, because the thing itself does not exist. Stolen *tête-à-têtes*, even furtive kisses, may, of course, be indulged in, but only under a modified chaperonage, the half-shut eye of parents or guardians. No young French lady would be permitted, for instance, to undertake a cycling expedition with her future husband. Still less could she take train with him for the purpose of visiting relations in the country, were the journey of half an hour's duration only. Love-making begins with the honeymoon.

The financial inquisition just alluded to is necessitated by the marriage contract. For centuries, alike in the humblest as well as the highest ranks, matrimonial settlements have kept family possessions together in France—and enriched village notaries!

No sooner was serfdom abolished than the peasants





BRIDAL PAIR (ÎLE D'OLÉRON)



followed bourgeois example, dowering their daughters and securing the interests of their sons by law. In provincial archives exist many of these documents, the rustic bride's portion consisting of furniture, clothes, money, and sometimes cattle or a bit of land. The archives of the Aube contain the marriage contract of a skilled day labourer (*manouvrier*) and a widow whose property was double that of his own. The deed secured him joint enjoyment and ownership. I cannot here, of course, enter into the intricacies of the French marriage laws. There is the *régime dotal*, which safeguards the dowry of the wife ; there is the *régime de la communauté*, which makes wedlock strictly a partnership as far as income and earnings are concerned. And there are minute regulations as to the provision for children and widows. The latter are always sacrificed to the former.

Twenty-five years ago an officer was not only obliged to secure a small dowry with his wife, about a thousand pounds rigidly tied down to her and her children ; he was also under the necessity of furnishing the Minister of War with two authoritative attestations of the bride's respectability and, up to a certain point, social standing. The moderate pay of French officers, and the Draconian edicts against the incurrence of debt in the French Army, quite prevent military men from taking portionless brides. And, indeed, outside Bohemia, slumland, or the world of the *déclassé*, portionless brides in France are an anomaly. No matter what her rank or condition, a girl brings her husband something, in modest hard-working circles often a little dowry of her own earning. The notary is as indispensable an agent of matrimony as the mayor or even the priest. Preliminaries of this kind comfortably settled, a bridegroom is in duty bound to make the acquaintance of his new family, and as the French character is eminently affectionate and sociable, this is frequently regarded as the pleasantest task possible.

Especially will a sisterless, brotherless bachelor find it delightful to be able to boast of newly acquired relations—*ma belle-sœur, ma cousine*, and so on. But a round of formal visits necessitates leisure, hence one reason for my friend's plaint, "I have no time to get married." The etiquette of betrothals is exceedingly strict, and upon every occasion love-making has to be sacrificed to conventionalities. Thus, whenever an accepted suitor accompanies his future mother-in-law and *fiancée* on visits of ceremony, he must offer his arm to the former ; on no occasion must he allow inclination to stand before punctilio.

Trousseau and marriage ceremony quickly follow betrothals. An engagement protracted throughout months and years, as is often the case in England, is unknown over the water. When a young man is in a position to marry he seeks a wife, not before. The fortune-hunters so scathingly dealt with in the brothers Margueritte's novel, "*Femmes Nouvelles*," I leave out of the question. What I am here attempting to describe is the normal, the average, the standard, not exceptional phases of French society. No self-respecting parents would have anything to do with the suitors described in the popular novel just named.

A word or two about trousseaux before entering upon the long-drawn-out marriage ceremonial.

A French friend never *gives*, always *offers* a gift : note the verbal nicety. Our own rough and ready way of making wedding presents shocks our neighbours no little. True that grandparents, uncles, and cousins may present a bride with an elegant purse containing money or notes ; outsiders must never send cheques, as is so often done here.

The *corbeille* formerly offered by the bridegroom consisted of rich velvets and silks, furs, old lace, family and modern jewels, a fan, and a missal, all packed in an elegant basket or straw box lined with satin. Among more modest

ranks these objects were replaced by dress pieces of less expensive material and trinkets. Some years since the fashion was introduced of replacing the *corbeille* by a considerable sum of money enclosed in an envelope. The custom, however, is not universal, and most often rings and jewellery, as in England, form a bridegroom's gifts.

Bridal gifts of friends are selected with great care, no amount of thought or time being grudged upon the selection. These preliminaries being satisfactorily arranged, the wedding day, or rather wedding days, quickly follow marriage contracts and the preparation of trousseaux. I use the plural noun, for in the land pre-eminently of method, precision, and formulary, a single day does not suffice for the most important ceremonial in human life. A Frenchman may not be twice wedded, but most often he is privileged with two wedding days: the civil, that is to say, the only legal marriage, preceding by twenty-four hours what is aptly called the nuptial benediction in church.

The civil marriage is gratuitous. On the arrival of the mayor, announced by officials, the wedding party rise. The mayor then reads the articles of the Code Civil relating to conjugal duties. The declaration of the *fiancés* and the permission of their parents being given, the pair are declared man and wife, and the register is handed to the lady for signature. Having affixed her name, she offers the pen to her husband, who replies, "Merci, madame," the coveted title now heard by her for the first time.

How, it may be asked, can municipal authorities find time to get through the work imposed by this obligation? The answer is simple. The mayor can always be represented by his deputy, or *adjoint*. In small communes one of these suffices; in large cities several are necessary. Thus, at Lyons the mayor is supported by no less than twelve *adjoints*, himself officiating only at the marriage of noteworthy personages. Fashionable folks are beginning

to simplify wedding festivities after English example, but the two days' programme still finds general favour, *déjeuner*, dinner, and ceremonies keeping bridegroom and best man, or *garçon d'honneur*, in their dress-coats from morning till night.

If French girls were not trained to habits of self-possession from childhood upwards, the double ordeal would be trying indeed. A mayor, especially if he happens to know the bride, will anticipate by a friendly little speech the solemn harangue of the priest to follow. Thus, when some years ago an Orleanist princess married into the Danish royal family, the mayor of the *arrondissement* wished her well, adding a few touching words about such leave-takings of kinsfolk and country.

Church ceremonials are very expensive affairs in France, weddings, like funerals, being charged for according to style. Those of the first and second class entitle the procession to entry by the front door of cathedral or church, to more or less music of the full orchestra, and to carpets laid down from porch to altar. Wedding parties of the third division go in by a side entrance, and without music or carpet traverse the aisle, the charges even so diminished being considerable.

I must say that were I a French bride-elect I should bargain for a wedding of the first class at any sacrifice. To have the portal of a cathedral thrown wide at the thrice-repeated knock of the beadle's staff, to hear the wedding march from "Lohengrin" pealed from the great organ, to reach the altar preceded by that gorgeous figure in cocked hat, red sash, plush tights, pink silk stockings, and silver-buckled shoes, all the congregation a-titter with admiration—surely the intoxication of such a moment were unrivalled! The strictest etiquette regulates every part of the proceedings. Accommodated with velvet armchairs, the bride's parents and relations are placed, according to degrees of consanguinity, immediately behind her *prie-dieu* ;



the bridegroom's family, arranged with similar punctiliousness, having seats on the other side of the nave. I well remember, at the first-class wedding of an acquaintance in Nantes Cathedral, how a little girl belonging to the bride's party had somehow got seated between relations of the bridegroom. Before the ceremony began the child was put in her proper place. Such a breach of etiquette could not on any account be permitted.

Churches in France are not always decorated with palms and flowers as with ourselves. Any additional expense would indeed be the last straw breaking the camel's back, rendering weddings a veritable *corvée*. But the high altar blazes with tapers, and floral gifts, natural and in paper or wax, adorn the chapels of the Virgin or patron saint.

One feature of the long-drawn-out ceremonial is the charge before alluded to made respectively to bride and bridegroom, a tremendous ordeal, one would think. Fortunately, French girls are equal to the occasion. The theme of priestly admonition, the cynosure of all eyes, a young bride will listen downcast and demure, but not in the least discomposed or in need of smelling-salts. Long training has fortified her against sentimentality or unbecoming show of emotion.

"You, mademoiselle," I once heard a village curé address a parishioner, a young woman belonging to the middle ranks, "you have before you the example of a mother fulfilling in every respect the duties now before yourself, wifely, maternal, and Christian," and so on, and so on, the bride listening calmly to personalities, admonitions, and forecasts that seemed in the highest degree disconcerting.

The wedding-rings, obligatory on both sides, received on a gold salver, blessed and adjusted, the plate is again proffered, this time for alms. Bank-notes, and gold or silver pieces are given, naturally the two former when marriages fall under the category of first and second class.

But by far the most distinctive and pictorial function of a French wedding is *la quête*, or collection for the poor. Next in interest to the bride herself is the *demoiselle d'honneur*, or bridesmaid, upon whom falls this conspicuous and graceful duty. A bride, distractingly pretty although she may be, has no part to play. All that is required of her is automatic collectedness and dignity. But the *demoiselle d'honneur* is under the necessity of acting a *rôle*, and, as a rule, most beautifully is it acted. The ceremony come to an end, the organist plays a prelude, and two figures detach themselves from the wedding party, both selected for personal charm, sprightliness, and *savoir-faire*—I am compelled to use a word for which we have no equivalent—both, also, perfectly dressed. The *garçon d'honneur*, or best man, wears dress-coat, white tie, waist-coat and gloves, his companion the newest, most elegant *toilette de ville*, or carriage costume. She gives her left hand to her cavalier, in her right holding a velvet bag; then the pair step airily forth, the most engaging smile, the most finished bow soliciting and acknowledging donations. It is the prettiest sight imaginable; and no wonder that the velvet bag rapidly fills, as, having made their way down the nave, lady and cavalier make the round of the church. And the name of the charming *quêteuse* invariably figures in the society column of the *Figaro* or local paper, a testimony to spirit, grace, and beauty.

A wedding gift in the form of a cheque shocks French susceptibilities. But at bridal receptions English taste is equally offended by the exhibition of the entire trousseau. In one of her essentially Parisian novels that delightful writer, Madame Bentzon, describes this feature, or rather animadverts upon such a display. The author of "Tchevelek," however, has consorted so much with the Anglo-Saxon world that, although Parisian to the tips of her fingers, she sees certain things through English and Transatlantic spectacles. The spreading before everybody's eyes



of slips and stockings, no matter how elaborate, evoked delicate irony from her pen.

It must not be supposed that, to use a homely simile, bride and bridegroom are yet out of the wood. A ball often follows breakfast or reception, the newly married pair stealing away in the small hours of the night, like hunted hares compelled to covert flight. This remark especially holds good with the middle and humbler ranks, and with provincial life. Society, following English initiative in everything, as I have said, has inaugurated English simplifications.

In one respect all unions resemble each other, and up to a certain point differ from our own. Family life in France is a wheel within a wheel, a piece of closely implicated machinery, a well-welded-together agglomeration of social and material interests. Marriage is not wholly a dual affair. Willy-nilly, brides and bridegrooms enter a clan, become members of a patriarchal tribe. Hence the parental inquisition on both sides, that minute investigation of character, circumstances, and family history so foreign to insular notions. Hence the widespread, I am tempted to say incalculable, effects of worldly ruin, loss of reputation, or other misfortune. A blow falls crushingly not only upon the immediate victim or culprit, but upon every one of their blood or bearing their name.

A French writer who knew England well once remarked that "César Birotteau" could not have been written of English commercial life. In that country a bankrupt ruins himself, not his entire family.

And some years ago, when walking with an old friend in Dijon, he said to me—

"Did you observe that nice-looking girl I saluted just now? Poor thing! she can never marry, her uncle having failed dishonourably in business."

An untarnished record, a roof-tree at which none can point a finger; last, but far from least, an accession rather

than a diminution of well-being—such is the ideal of a French Cœlebs in search of a wife.

“Find me an English wife,” a bachelor friend once said to me in all seriousness. “Your recommendation will suffice. Provided you consider the lady a suitable partner for me, I shall be entirely satisfied. I place my fortune in your hands.”

A highly characteristic incident.

## CHAPTER IX

### WIVES AND MOTHERS

**I**N most French households women reign with unchallenged sway; they wield "all the rule, one empire." Let not such feminine headship be summarily attributed to uxoriousness on the one side or to a masterful spirit on the other. The condition has been brought about by a combination of circumstances, moral and material, social and economic. To begin with, the Frenchwoman possesses in a wholly unsurpassed degree the various aptitudes that shine in domestic and business management. She is never at a loss, never muddle-headed, always more than able to hold her own. The secret of this unrivalled capacity is concentration. A Frenchwoman's mental and physical powers are not frittered away upon multifarious objects. She is not at one and the same time a devotee of society, a member of a political association, an active crusader in some philanthropic cause, a champion golfer, tennis, or hockey player, or what is called a "Church worker." Thus it comes about that the French feminine mind is freer than that of her Anglo-Saxon sister, her bodily powers are subject to much less wear and tear. And, perhaps, owing to the fact of idolized, over-indulged childhood, the Frenchwoman's will is stronger. She is less yielding, less given to compromise, and more authoritative. Nor do weaknesses, sentimentalities, or vapours impair such strengthful character.

Certainly here and there you may find a French-

woman who screams at a mouse or a spider, such whimsical timidity not in the least incapacitating her from the command of an army. Authority is her native element; the faculty of organization is here an intuitive gift. Hardly necessary is it to dilate upon personal magnetism, the beauty, as Michelet wrote, "made up of little nothings," the conversation oftentimes describable in similar terms—the acquired graces that strike us as natural endowments, Nature's partial liberality. No wonder, therefore, that for good or for evil the Salic law has ever been set at naught in French society, that alike château and cottage bow to one-sided law—to feminine ukase. And who can say—the great democracy of the Western world owes its name, perhaps its very existence, to a woman? A quiet little *bourgeoise*, wife of an obscure journalist named Robert, we now learn, was the first to breathe the word "Republic" in conjunction with the name of France. In her modest salon about the year 1790 first took form and cohesion the project of a democratic government on the American model. Before her time one woman had saved France, and more than one had well-nigh wrought her downfall. Jeanne d'Arc, Madame de Maintenon, the Pompadour, not to mention another nearer our own time, are instances of "all the rule, one empire" exercised—alas! not always for the public weal—by Frenchwomen.

Financial conditions add immense weight to natural advantages. Except among the Micawber class, represented in greater or less degree all the world over, a French wife is propertied; she brings an equal share to the setting up of a household and the founding of a family. "With all my worldly goods I thee endow" is a formula applicable to bride as well as bridegroom, although in neither case is the endowment a free, unconditional gift. Respective interests are strictly safeguarded by the notary, a personage no less necessary to the middle and working classes than to the rich. No matter how inconsiderable a

young woman's dowry, it is tied down to herself and her children with every legal formality. Some years since I attended the wedding of a village schoolmaster and a gamekeeper's daughter in Champagne. Each possessed money or land equivalent to about two hundred pounds, the two small fortunes, down to the minutest particular, being mentioned in the marriage contract. A wedding without settlements, as I have said, is an anomaly in France.

In one respect at least there is no sexual inequality among our neighbours. My face is my fortune, was not the burden of peasant maidens even under the *ancien régime*. Whilst this feminine supremacy, I should perhaps say suzerainty, has been an evolutionary process in accordance with the fitness of things, it will occasionally wear an inconsistent or autocratic look. I well remember one instance in point, scenes that reminded me of Balzac. Many and many a time have I sat down to the Friday table of my kind old friend Madame G——, near Dijon (long since, alas! gone to her rest), the family party consisting of her son, a man of fifty, a widower, his boy, a strippling of eighteen, and her son-in-law, a widower also, and well past sixty. The season being September, as soon as the early second *déjeuner* was over these men, with uncles and cousins living close by, would set off for a seven or eight hours' tramp in search of wild boars in the forest or quails on the plain.

Eggs and potatoes at half-past ten or eleven o'clock, eggs and potatoes at the half-past six o'clock dinner reminded me of Mrs. Micawber's "heel of Dutch cheese, an unsuitable nutriment for a young family." Madame G——'s bill of fare did not certainly seem adequate in the case of famished sportsmen footing it for seven or eight hours on a brisk September day. The three men might covertly eye my own tiny slice of cold meat, the priestly ordinance not applying to Protestants, but they said

nothing. My hostess, indeed, could very well have passed for the mistress of a *pension bourgeoise*, son, son-in-law, and grandson being poorly paying or indebted boarders. Once, indeed, rebellion broke out, taking a humorous turn. A tempting dish of cold pasty, nicely sliced, on its way to myself, came within reach of my neighbour's fork. The opportunity was not to be resisted. "Ma foi! for once I'll be a Protestant too!" ejaculated madame's elderly son-in-law, as he spoke prodding a goodly morsel. His companions chuckled, the maid tittered, and, seeing that her mistress did not take the joke amiss, after having served me she plumped down the dish before the three wistful men.

Benignant, even-tempered, in other respects far from egotistical, my dear old friend regarded motherhood as a patent conferring undivided and ever-enduring authority. When her son or son-in-law attempted to discuss any subject that menaced such authority, she would cut them short with the remark, "I am your mother, and *must* know best." And so kindly and affectionate was the dear soul that the yoke was complacently borne.

Here I anticipate an objection. How, it may be asked, is the foregoing statement reconciled with the stability of the Third Republic? Has it not been said, and indeed proved again and again, that the vast majority of Frenchmen have shaken off sacerdotalism, whilst their wives and mothers for the most part remain wedded to priestly ordinance? Where, then, some will ask, is the feminine influence you speak of, since it is evidently neutral in political affairs?

My answer to these observations is short. There is one point, and one only, on which a Frenchman, no matter how easy going, is unyielding, and that is his vote. And the natural good sense of Frenchwomen stands them here in good stead. No matter the force of their own convictions, they accept a compromise based on expediency.



Setting aside fireside relations and the principle of give and take, there is the question of family interest, the stability of the Republic from a domestic aspect. How largely middle-class fortunes are bound up with the Government, the prevailing system of bureaucracy tells us. Here is an instance in point. The other day I received what is called a *faire part*, or printed notice of a friend's death, giving, according to fashion, the name and occupation of her male relations. Of the ten specified two only belonged to professions, one was in the army, two were priests, the remaining five held Government appointments. Roughly speaking, I should say this is typical, that in most bourgeois families the proportion of Government officials would be as five to five. No, wonder, then, that wives and mothers discreetly keep silent when elections come round. The great minister Sully used to say that tillage and pasturage were the fountains of French wealth. To a large section of society, it is the Government that now usurps these functions, playing the part of a Providence. And, as I have shown elsewhere, bureaucracy, that is to say, an income moderate maybe but sure, suits French character, which is the very antipodes of American go-ahead wear and tear. It is rare indeed in France that you find Gambetta's counterpart, "an old man of forty." But when are Americans young?

I should not call the average Frenchwoman cosmopolitan. Parental adulation, exclusive surroundings, often conventual bringing-up, unfit the average Frenchwoman for international or social give and take. Small indeed is the number who could say with Montaigne, "I am not guilty of the common error of judging another by myself; I easily believe what in another's humour is contrary to my own." The lady president of a philanthropic association confided to me the other day that this uncompromisingness greatly handicapped such movements. "Every woman here interested in works of benevolence or social progress,"

she said, "has her own scheme and will not fall in with the plans of others." Anything like the Primrose League or Women's Liberal Associations is out of the question in France. Hence it comes about that when an Englishman succumbs to French charms, for him the die is doubly cast. He must thenceforward forswear English speech, native land, and a career among his own people for his wife's sake. It is a case of love being lord of all with a vengeance. Many English wives of Frenchmen, especially among the Protestant community, spend their lives happily enough in France. French mistresses of English homes are rare indeed. When Madame de Staël pronounced exile to be worse than death, she voiced the convictions of her countrywomen.

I was lately lunching with an old friend in Paris, a country gentleman from the Indre much interested in the question of French colonization.

"One great obstacle," he observed, "is the loathing of my countrywomen for any place out of France. The other day a young friend, a settler in one of your Australian countries, was here on a visit, and wrote back to his partner that he was looking about for a wife. 'For heaven's sake wait till you return, and marry an English girl,' wrote the other; 'Frenchwomen in a foreign colony are insupportable.'"

But *la Française est avant tout mère*, "the Frenchwoman is first and foremost a mother," our sisters over the water tell us. Filial, wifely, civic duty, each must give way to the maternal. Thus words are hardly strong enough in which to express a Frenchwoman's disapproval of Anglo-Indian wives who remain at their husbands' sides, sending home their young children to be educated. The secret of English colonization lies not so much in national energy as in the tremendous strength of the marriage tie. A celibate bureaucracy, however numerous or efficient, cannot compete with the family life

characterizing Greater Britain societies, no matter under what sky, offering the conditions of home. This matter is now occupying politicians and philanthropists. A society has been lately formed for the purpose of forwarding the emigration of women, and the lady president, with whom I lately had a long conversation, spoke hopefully of its future. The Protestant pastor and missionary, she told me, are of the very greatest value in the movement, as, being fathers of families, they can offer temporary homes to young women awaiting situations ; most of these, of course, eventually marry.

The Frenchwoman does not exaggerate. She is *par excellence* the mother. Why the first maternal duty should always be relegated to a wet nurse I have never been able to discover. In every other respect her devotion knows no bounds. Indeed, were I asked to state the ambition of Frenchwomen generally, I should say that it is neither to shine in art, literature, science, nor philanthropy, but to become a grandmother ; the adored, over-fondled son or daughter revived in a second generation evokes devotion amounting to idolatry—an idolatry shared by the other sex. As we all know, one of the best Presidents of the Third Republic—that staunch Republican, splendid advocate, and true patriot, Jules Grévy—here found his pitfall. Poor President Grévy ! Not that he loved France less, but that he loved his little granddaughters more. With Victor Hugo, *l'art d'être grandpère* had become infatuation.

Nothing is ever done by halves in France. Of late years the disastrous effects of over-indulged childhood has become a public question. Could parents be prevented from spoiling their one boy or girl by law, there is little doubt that a Bill to that effect would be laid before the Chamber to-morrow. Other means of arousing general attention have been tried. In Paris just now the stage has usurped the functions of the pulpit. By turns, wet-nursing, alcoholism, and other social evils are treated

dramatically, the success of 1902 being "La Course au Flambeau." This piece turns entirely upon the exaggerated and mischievous self-sacrifice of parents on behalf of their children. The heroine, a *rôle* superbly played by Madame Réjane, is a middle-aged lady belonging to the upper middle class who has an only daughter, and who for this incarnation of selfishness, inanition, and lackadaisicalness, sacrifices not only her husband's and her own well-being, but her conscience. In fact, she becomes virtually the murderess of her aged mother. It was interesting to note the behaviour of the vast audience. No love-story, no intrigue, no humorous episode relieved the fireside tragedy. A piece of domestic realism, an everyday story, held every one spellbound. When you ask French folks if this or any other crying evil is likely to be lessened by sermonizing on the stage, however, they shake their heads. It happened that my companion at the theatre was a young French lady, earning her livelihood as secretary in a business house. The piece naturally interested her greatly, and here are her comments—

"It is the greatest possible unkindness of parents to wrap their children up in cotton-wool. Look at my own case. I was brought up in the belief that life was to be one prolonged fairy tale; that I need only hold out my hand, and everything I wanted would drop into it. I well remember one birthday. Throughout the day my parents told me I should do as I liked; I might ask for anything and everything in their power to bestow. After *déjeuner* we went to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, where I rode in a goat-chaise, on the elephant's back, had ices, cakes, sweetmeats, and heaven knows what. Do you suppose I was satisfied? Not in the least. The day ended in tears and sulkiness. And at eighteen, in consequence of family losses, instead of being dowered and married, having fine toilettes, servants, and every luxury, I found myself compelled to turn out into the world to earn my bread."

Which she had done, however, with the best grace imaginable.

One word in conclusion. If maternal devotion at times proves a snare, how often in France does it cast a halo around homely brows! The honoured President of the Third Republic does not here stand alone. Were the history of illustrious Frenchmen scanned from this point of view, we should find many a one, like M. Loubet, owing the opportunities of success to a peasant-born mother. And the well-known acknowledgment of the newly elected President, the halting on his triumphal entry into Montélimar in order to embrace that venerable mother, was an incident moistening every French eye, warming every French heart. M. Loubet's popularity was straightway assured.



CHAPTER X

THE SINGLE LADY

A FOREIGNER suddenly plunged into French society and quitting it without any chance of modifying first impressions would affirm that there were no single women in France—that the spinster, the old maid, did not exist.

Certainly there is no equivalent over the water to a considerable element in English social life. We might vainly search the eighty-six departments and the Territoire de Belfort for a Bath or a Clifton, towns or suburbs largely peopled by rich maiden ladies. Nor in the provinces is to be found a counterpart of the unmarried, gentlewoman, with her handsome establishment, her grooms, gardeners, and equipages, all under first-rate management, all betokening the most complete independence and a wide outlook upon life, in many cases single life being a pure matter of choice. Spinsterhood must be looked for elsewhere in France. The feminine world of fashion generally hides grey hairs and lost illusions in the convent boarding-house. Here and there devotion and philanthropy outside such walls are resorted to, rarely social distractions or active life. In the upper ranks celibate womanhood effaces itself,

Before turning to the army of lady doctors, dentists, professors, artists, and authors, let us consider their ill-advised sisters, the tens of thousands who virtually retire from the world simply because they happen to be unmarried. Much is to be said for their own view of the



case. I can, indeed, conceive no more mortifying position than that of a French girl growing elderly under her mother's wing. Take the matter of money, for instance. So long as her mother lives, an unmarried daughter, no matter her age, is treated like a child. Immediately an English girl leaves school she has her allowance for dress and personal expenses. In France it is the parent who pays for everything, New Year's gifts or *étrennes* taking the place of pocket-money. I well remember the astonishment of a French lady at seeing an English girl of twenty-five write out a cheque in her own name. Such a thing, she informed me, she had never heard of.

Such pecuniary dependence is not only galling; it stultifies and renders the individual unfit for future conduct of practical affairs. How much, moreover, may daily happiness often depend upon what look like trifles, among these the possession of a little money, and upon the unfettered use of that little! But French "old maids of thirty" or even more must have no innocent little secrets, no private generosityes, no harmless mysteries. The demoiselle in the eyes of her family remains a perpetual minor. In a society hemmed round with ordinance and traditional etiquette, a young or even middle-aged woman of rank and position could not possibly set up house-keeping on her own account. She would be at once set down as eccentric, a kind of Bohemian, and be tabooed by society. And bringing up has totally unfitted her for an independent life. Never accustomed to walk out or travel alone, always chaperoned when paying visits, her reading, amusements, friends chosen for her, her notions of etiquette in harmony with such restrictions, no wonder that she regards her life as a failure, that the convent or convent *pension* are regarded as harbours of refuge. Caprice, disappointments, a spirit of self-sacrifice, the belief in a vocation, will induce many a girl to take the veil before crossing the rubicon, the twenty-fifth birthday dubbing her

as a spinster. And to the old maid of thirty or thirty-five whose dowry or personal attractions have not secured a partner, the convent offers the cheapest possible provision for life. Ten thousand francs, four hundred pounds paid down, and the recluse is housed, fed, clothed, and cared for till the end of her days. Seclusion, moreover, is a salvo to her own dignity. A nun is no longer regarded in the light of *une vieille fille*; her calling has not only sanctity about it, but good repute. The step is invariably approved of.

More especially is a recluse praised who buries herself alive from family considerations, giving up home, friends, individuality, for the sake perhaps of a younger sister, perhaps of a younger brother. We must bear in mind the fact that in the upper ranks, in what is called *la société*, no girl has any chances whatever of marrying without a sufficient dowry. And let us not on this account set down all Frenchmen of this class as money-hunters. Official and professional incomes are a third lower than with us, the cost of living as certainly a third higher. Thus it comes about that officers of rank and men holding official positions cannot possibly set up housekeeping without additional means. From the money point of view wedlock must be essentially a partnership.

Realizing the absolute necessity of a dowry, then, an elder sister will sometimes betake herself to a convent in order that a younger may make a brilliant or suitable marriage. Quite possibly, also, she may act thus on a brother's behalf, enabling him by the same means to add to family wealth and prestige. No sacrifice is considered too great for *la famille* in France.

Four hundred pounds is the minimum sum accepted by religious houses as a dowry, which may, of course, reach any figure. The convent *pension* or boarding-house is also regarded as an unexceptionable retreat for single ladies of means and gentility. Expenses in such establishments are moderate, but vary according to style and accommodation.

Here and there devotional exercises and works of charity are made a career of by rich single women preferring to remain in the world. Except at charity bazaars and similar functions, these ladies—a small minority—are seldom met with. You may, indeed, go into French society for years and never encounter a single lady—that is to say, one who has grown, or is growing, old—without the wedding ring. To find out what becomes of the French demoiselle we must refer to statistics. In 1900 no less than sixty-four thousand women were immured for life within convent walls!

A very different train of thought is called up by a glance at the middle class and work-a-day world. The doctor's gown has long been worn by Frenchwomen. Not long since a second Portia achieved a notable triumph at the assizes at Marseilles. Lady solicitors practise in Paris. In country towns, as well as in the capital, you may see the inscription on the door-plate, "*Mademoiselle So-and-so, chirurgien-dentiste*" ("surgeon-dentist"). In a little town I know, Balzac's favourite Nemours, scene of "*Ursule Mirouët*," a young lady dentist and her sister have a flourishing practice. French peasants and working folks seldom indulge in the luxury of false teeth, but an aching tooth is soon got rid of, and for the modest fee of two francs mademoiselle adroitly manipulates the forceps. Lady oculists may now also be consulted. In the arena of education, primary and advanced, Frenchwomen run almost a neck and neck race with the other sex. Forty-three thousand women in 1900 occupied positions in State schools, numbering only twenty thousand less than male professors and teachers. By far the larger number of these women teachers are, of course, unmarried, and if such careers are neither brilliant nor a fulfilment of youthful dreams, they are dignified, useful, and doubtless often contented and even happy.

A recent novel by a new writer that I can warmly

commend to all readers, "L'Un vers l'Autre," gives interesting glimpses of a girls' lycée, or high school, and a group of lady professors. In Madame Th. Bentzon's new story, "Au dessus de l'abîme," the same subject is treated from a different point of view. Both volumes are highly instructive. Unfortunately, few French novelists depict middle-class life as it is in reality. Were such a task taken in hand by competent writers, our neighbours, their ways and modes of thought, would not be so often grotesquely misconceived.

The youngish unmarried lady doctor, oculist, dentist, advocate, or professor naturally enjoys an amount of freedom vainly sighed for by her sisters in fashionable society. She reads what books she pleases, her theatre-going is not restricted to the Comédie Française and the Odéon, acquaintances of the other sex may pay their respects to her when she is at home to friends. But the freedom from restraint enjoyed by English and American spinsterhood would look subversive, anarchical, Nihilistic in French eyes.

Some years since I was staying with friends at Nantes who often invited the lady principal of a technical school for girls to dinner. Upon one occasion another *habitué* of the house was present, a man upwards of sixty. On mademoiselle rising to say good night, Monsieur T— begged that he might escort her home, the house being a few minutes off. Drawing herself up haughtily, the lady replied (she was thirty-five at least), "I am greatly your debtor, monsieur, but my maid awaits me in the corridor." Imagine a middle-aged lady not being able to accept the arm of a fellow-guest for a few hundred yards! Another anecdote forcibly brings out the French mode of regarding these matters. An American lady journalist living in Paris told me that one day she received a visit from a French acquaintance, rather friend, of the other sex, a busy man, who had most kindly found time to help her in

some literary transactions. The pair were both middle-aged, the lady being slightly older than her visitor. By the time the business in hand had been discussed dinner was ready, Miss S—— keeping her own *bonne*, and occupying a pretty little flat.

“Why not stay and partake?” she asked, surely a very natural invitation under the circumstances!

For a moment the other hesitated, the invitation evidently tempted; then in a semi-paternal tone he asked her if she had ever entertained friends of the other sex before. On her reply in the negative, he shook her hand in the friendliest fashion, saying, “Then be advised by me and do not begin.”

This gentleman had doubtless in his mind the ever-prying eye and oftentimes too ready tongue of the *concierge* or portress of Parisian blocks, an encroacher upon privacy fortunately unknown among ourselves. The janitrix of French doorways is not a popular personage, and youngish ladies living alone are especially subject to inquisitorial observation. As a rule the French single lady never does live alone. She boards with some other member of her family or with friends, the strictest etiquette guiding every action.

The Portias, Æsculapias, and lady graduates in letters and science naturally do not make the cloister their retreat in advancing years. For single women of very small means, the *rentière* or annuitant of a thousand or two francs, in certain country towns we find what is called *Une Maison de Retraite*, or associated home. One of these I visited some time since at Rheims. This establishment which is under municipal patronage, offers rooms, board, attendance, laundress, and even a small plot of garden, for sums varying from sixteen to twenty-four pounds per inmate, the second sum, of course, ensuring better rooms and more liberal fare. Special arrangements are made for unmarried ladies. Whether they like it or no, they are



expected to take their meals in a separate dining-room. The advantages of such a system in France are very great, single women of small means being thus afforded protection and immunity from household cares. Except that the lodge gates are closed at ten o'clock p.m., personal liberty is not interfered with. Needless to say that no breath of scandal must reach these precincts. Only immaculate respectability possesses an Open Sesame. My impression was one of prevailing cheerfulness and content. But the plan would never answer in England. The insular character rebels against restrictions, however well-intentioned, and where could be found scores and scores of *petites rentières*, professional women and governesses, whose earnings and economy have ensured them an income in old age? Further, Englishwomen can live alone, Frenchwomen cannot do so. A series of delightful old maids have been rendered immortal by later English novelists. Our *confrères* of the other sex over the water, from Balzac downward, often seem to regard spinsterhood as a veritable crime.

It remains for some new writer to rehabilitate this section of the *beau sexe*, to portray those types of womanhood described by the late Lord Shaftesbury as "adorable old maids."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE DOMESTIC HELP

OUR neighbours have adopted the word "comfortable" without, at least in an insular sense, acclimatizing the thing. And here it may be as well to mention that whilst Gallicizing this adjective they were but borrowing what belonged to them. *Confortable*, naturalized by the French Academy in 1878, is a derivative of the English "comfortable," but "comfortable" in its turn is a derivative of the old French verb *conforter*—to comfort spiritually or morally, to impart courage. Thus Corneille wrote, "Dieu conforta cette âme désolée," "God comforted that desolate soul."

*Le confortable*, now so frequent on French lips, is used strictly in a material sense, implying the conveniences of life and the enjoyment of well-being generally. How widely standards of material comfort differ in the two countries is forcibly brought home to us by the condition of the domestic help. In France both sexes betake themselves to household work much more readily than with us. The *valet de chambre*, or chamberman, is wholly unknown on this side of the water. That domestic service is popular, the enormous number of young Frenchwomen who seek situations here as nursemaids and ladies' maids abundantly proves. Expatriation is not only distasteful to the French mind, it is positively loathsome; yet the supply of French domestic servants must be considerably in excess of the demand. And it is by no means

English comfort that attracts. Provided these reluctant strangers within our gates get good wages and good food, they are utterly indifferent to what are looked upon as absolute necessities by their English fellows. Paradoxically enough, servants' comfort is the last thing thought of in democratic France. The cosy, curtained, carpeted sitting-room of our own cooks and housemaids, the sofa on which they can stretch weary limbs, the bedrooms furnished every whit as comfortably as their employers', the bathrooms at their disposal—all these are non-existent; and so ineradicable is force of habit that I doubt very much if the introduction of any would be much appreciated.

In private hotels and the more spacious flats of Paris servants sleep under the master's roof; they have also a room for meals called *l'office*, but in nowise answering to our servants' hall or sitting-room. The *office* is a bare, uncarpeted, uncurtained apartment, containing long table and upright chairs, against the walls being huge linen presses and cupboards containing china and cutlery. But the *bonne*, or maid-of-all-work, in even a fair-sized and expensive flat, lives under conditions that Miss Slowboy would have found intolerable. I speak with the authority of oft-renewed experience, having stayed in many boarding-houses and private flats in the eighth and seventeenth arrondissements, both handsome, modern, and *recherché* quarters. The kitchens could only be called mere slips; to dignify them by any other name were a misnomer. Just room had been allowed for two chairs, on which the one or two servants could sit down to meals, no more. But if comfort was out of the question downstairs, equally absent was it from the attic where they slept in the roof, stiflingly hot in summer, bitterly cold during winter, and, worse of all, tiny compartment of a thickly populated beehive. Not only are domestic servants, thus housed, but shop assistants and others, with what dire results we may imagine.

"Terrible indeed is the condition of country girls who come to Paris as maids-of-all-work," a Parisian friend observed to me the other day. "Drudging from morning till night, half a day's holiday once a month, no other holidays throughout the year ; most often shut out of their employer's flat at night. This class is much to be pitied. But come to Paris these girls will, tempted by better wages."

And the daughter of this lady, being shown, on her visit to England, the comfortable bedroom and cosy, carpeted, curtained kitchen, with easy-chair of an English "general," could hardly believe her eyes. I have said elsewhere our neighbours of all classes are very indifferent to what in England is called comfort. Details regarded as strict necessities here, over the water are luxuries, indulgences, often fads.

On the other hand, domestic servants in France enjoy a *laissez aller* unknown with ourselves. Take the matter of uniform, for instance. The scrupulously neat black dress with speckless white apron and coquettish cap of our parlourmaids, the neat prints of our housemaids, the white dresses of our nursemaids, could never be attained by French housewives. If their domestic staff, according to insular notions, has a good deal to complain of as far as comfort goes, this comparative ease and unceremoniousness is doubtless an adequate compensation. A *femme de chambre* who helps the manservant in the housework, and at the same time acts as ladies' maid, dresses precisely as she pleases. She may be very particular or the reverse ; no notice is taken of her personal appearance. The scrupulosity exacted of our neat-handed Phyllises would drive Jeanne or Marie mad. Nor is nonchalance confined to dress and outward nicety. Accustomed as they are to make themselves at home, French servants must find the atmosphere of an English home somewhat chilling. The free and easy existence on the other side of the Channel

is much dearer to them than the comforts with which they are surrounded here. "Liberty, equality, fraternity" is a watchword that applies to the tongue as well as to laws and liberties in France. The privilege of making as much noise as one pleases is much more valued than that of spacious dining-rooms, easy-chairs, and comfortable sleeping accommodation.

In country houses I should say matters remain much as they were when Arthur Young made his wonderful tour of France a hundred and fifteen years ago. The woman servant's bedroom is often a mere niche in the kitchen. Dear old Justine of Burgundian memory! Many a time have I seen you perform your simple toilette for mass undisturbed by the passing to and fro of mistress, master, young master, and guest. Justine's bedroom was a little chamber in the kitchen wall, rather an alcove a trifle wider than the recess of recumbent statue in church or cathedral. Now, the kitchen led to the back door, and the back door opened on to the high-road a stone's throw from church and village. It was, indeed, the most frequented portion of the house. Here the gentlemen prepared for their day's chase in the forest, and here the household assembled on Sunday morning before starting in a body for church.

The midday meal would be left to cook itself, so, having carefully deposited her potatoes in the wood embers, and her *potée* or savoury mess of meat and vegetables on the hob, Justine would step on to her bed, and unceremoniously don her black stuff gown, clean mob cap and kerchief, exchange carpet slippers for well-blackened shoon, and even sometimes replace one pair of coarse white stockings by another. No one paid any attention whatever to the dear blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, childishly simple old thing close upon seventy, whose life from childhood upwards had been spent in the family. For many years Justine's wages had been £6 yearly; this sum gradually increased to £10, I





M. LE PRÉFET REWARDS LONG SERVICE  
(A SCENE FROM "MADAME BOVARY")



dare say New Year's gifts making up £5 more. But at £10 the wages stopped, and so well had Justine husbanded her resources that regularly as her employers she received her dividend in State rentes.

It would have been interesting to learn the sum-total of Justine's earnings during her long service. A few years ago the faithful old servant went to her rest, dying under her master's roof, her hard-earned savings going to a somewhat unsatisfactory daughter—alas! a much too common story in France. The mere fact of hoarding is often the only enjoyment of the hoarder. Justine belonged to a type fast disappearing. It may be said, indeed, that the faithful old servants Balzac delighted to portray—the Nanons, Gasselins, and Mariottes—are already obsolete. Even in Justine's days bonnets were fast superseding the traditionary *coiffe*, and in France, as in England, cooks and housemaids began to be agog for change. I do not know if such is still the case, but twenty-five years ago, in spacious flats of large provincial cities, the servant's bedroom was often the kitchen. Soon after the Franco-Prussian war I wintered at Nantes with the widow of a late Préfet. Besides very large dining and drawing rooms, there were four or five good bedchambers in my hostess's handsome flat; yet our nice Bretonne, the cook, slept and performed her toilet in a recess of what was both cook-room and scullery.

As all travellers in France know, the peasants have often four-posters in their kitchens—these of enormous proportions, and placed in alcoves, two sometimes facing each other. The habit has doubtless arisen partly from the excessive cold of French winters, partly, in former days, from fear of marauders. But in the more progressive districts the custom is fast dying out. No rich peasant builds himself a house at the present time without adding good airy bedrooms. More particularly is pride taken in a sightly staircase, a feature of domestic architecture formerly

represented by the outside ladder leading to hayloft or harness-room.

A good-natured indifference to what is called comfort in English eyes characterizes French country life generally. Folks so far from being fastidious about themselves are not likely to pamper their households. A stockman boarded by wealthy landowners I know, shares the sleeping accommodation of his bees, having for bedstead a wooden shelf adjoining the neat-house ; for bed, plenty of straw. Alike men and women servants kept in large farmhouses perform their ablutions at the pump—hardly, perhaps, with the thoroughness and gusto of Trooper George !

Once more, to recall the immortal picture-gallery, I may mention that even France, the country above all others “rich in all-saving common sense,” has its Mrs. Jellabys. One philanthropic lady I knew made over her considerable fortune to the town she inhabited, constituting herself a municipal annuitant. The property was to be ultimately laid out in a training farm and dairy school for Protestant and Catholic orphan girls. It happened that a newly engaged lady companion and housekeeper suggested the desirability of water-jugs and hand-basins for the indoor servants—cook, housemaid, and man-of-all-work, who waited at table, drove the brougham, and made himself generally useful. The benevolent châtelaine at first laughed the notion to scorn. “Toilette services for domestics ! Whoever heard of such a thing !” she cried, finally allowing herself to be inveigled into the startling innovation. This happened twenty years ago, but I have no doubt that in out-of-the-way country places the primitiveness of Madame G——’s arrangements might still be matched.

One side of this general *laissez aller* in France would be much appreciated by many housewives here. There is no punctilious differentiation of labour among French servants—at least, none to be compared with that prevailing in England. The scrupulosity of our ladylike Ethels and

Mabels in black dresses and white streamers is wanting ; but, on the other hand, Louise and Pauline are much less fussy, stand less upon their dignity, and in emergencies prove more useful, being generally able to turn their hands to anything. Again, Louise and Pauline are less ambitious, exacting, and flighty. They do not require fixed hours for pianoforte or mandoline lessons, cycling, or walks with young men. Indeed, etiquette is as strict among well-conducted women servants as among ladies moving in society. A respectable French girl occupying a good place would never dream of going to a music-hall or any other place of entertainment with her betrothed only ; some member of her family or friend must accompany them. And the lover of a well-conducted maidservant in France is invariably her betrothed—no mere hanger-on, changed on the slightest provocation. Sober of dress and behaviour, by no means wedded to routine, usually excessively obliging, the French *bonne* or *femme de chambre* often possesses qualities that compensate for English fastidiousness and attention to detail. But it is in the essential, the palmary characteristic of the nation that domestic servants shine. Not for pleasure's sake, not in order to dress according to the very latest fashion, not that the eyes of some amorous swain may be dazzled, does a Louise or a Pauline put up with what is oftentimes excessively laborious service. One object, and one only, is ever before their eyes, those of a marksman no more intently fixed upon the target. These deft-handed, brisk French girls, fortunately for themselves, are utterly without sentimentality or false pride. Their dream is eminently practical, their life's aim, not the stockingful of their ancestors, but instead a respectable account with that universal banker of French folks—the State. Very likely, as in Justine's case, saving for saving's sake may be the only reward of lifelong drudgery. Between virtues and foibles the partition as often as not is a mere Japanese wall—a sheet of thread-paper. Frugality degenerates into

avarice; the inestimable quality of thrift becomes sordidness.

Here is a telling instance in point. A few years ago the châtelaine of a fine chateau in northern France took me for a day or two to her winter residence in the provincial capital. A former woman servant, now elderly, acted as caretaker of the spacious hotel, vacating it when the family returned in November. "You know France so well that you will easily believe what I am going to tell you," observed my hostess. "Yonder good woman has property bringing in two hundred pounds a year, yet for the sake of earning a little more to add to it she takes charge of our house throughout the winter, living absolutely alone and doing what work is necessary."

In England a superannuated cook or housekeeper so situated would, of course, settle down in a tiny semi-detached villa, keep a neat maid, and sit down to afternoon tea in a black silk gown. Other countries, other ideals! Although the Balzacian types have all but disappeared, good servants here and there grow grey in good places. A stay of ten, fifteen, or even twenty years under the same roof is not unknown. And the criterion of a good place is the facility it affords for putting by; comfort, leisure, holidays count for very little. Wages, New Year's gifts, and perquisites stand before every other consideration. The lightening of M. Thiers' herculean task in paying off the Prussian war indemnity is generally attributed to the peasant. But the amount of money invested by domestic servants must be colossal. I should accredit cooks and housemaids, footmen and *valets de chambre*, with a large share of that astounding settlement. Many a Tilly Slow-boy, even a Marchioness, doubtless had a hand in the patriotic scoring-off. Let us, then, not too harshly judge a weakness that English people, alas! are guileless of—namely, care over-much for the morrow.

## CHAPTER XII

### MESSIEURS LES DÉPUTÉS

THE tricolour scarf of the French *député* confers privileges that may well make their brother legislators here green with envy. His services are remunerated almost as liberally as those of a general or a bishop ; he travels first class free of charge on French railways ; whenever a review is given in honour of imperial or royal guests, with senators and diplomats he enjoys the privilege of a special train, stand, and refreshment booth, his wife and daughter being included in the invitation. State functions, metropolitan and provincial celebrations, the *entrée* of the Elysée, are enjoyed by him, to say nothing of *prestige* and authority ; last, but not least, the much-coveted advantage of *une existence assurée*, in other words, a fixed income. Is it any wonder that the Quay d'Orsay exercises magnetic influence, attracting recruits alike from learned, commercial, and rural ranks, and that politics indeed should be regarded in the light of a profession ?

“Have you professional politicians in England ?” a Frenchman once asked me. I replied in the negative. Certainly we have no professional politicians as the terms are understood over the water.

A deputy's pay is nine thousand francs, just £360. The sum of ten francs (8s.) is deducted monthly, and in return he receives what is called *une carte de circulation*, by virtue of which he is franked on every railway line throughout France, the sums deducted being made over to the railway companies. This concession dates from 1882 only. The



payment of members was regulated by Articles 96 and 97 of the Constitution, March, 1849, and confirmed in February, 1872.

A seat in the Chamber, therefore, secures the average income of a professional man or civil servant in France.

Politics do not involve any sacrifice of material interests, rather the reverse. Hence it comes about that active careers are frequently exchanged for the *rôle* of legislator, and that many don the tricolour scarf as the soldier his uniform and the advocate his gown. The former must work hard and wait long before attaining the grade that entitles him to similar emoluments, and the latter must take countless turns in the *Salle des Pas Perdus* before he is equally fortunate. Doctors, too, in country places, most of them begin to turn grey ere earning deputy's pay.

The heterogeneous composition of the French Chamber thus becomes explicable. We need no longer wonder at the fact that hardly a calling but is here represented.

In the sum-total of five hundred and ninety-one actual members we find soldiers, sailors, civil engineers, medical men, veterinary surgeons and chemists, priests, philosophers, mathematicians, professors and librarians, architects, archæologists, painters, etchers and engravers, academicians, historians, political economists, dramatists, men of letters and journalists, bankers, distillers, manufacturers, ironmasters, agriculturists and wine-growers, "sportsmen" thus categorized, explorers and merchant captains, shoemakers, village schoolmasters, stonemasons, potters, compositors, miners, mechanics, and lastly, *cabaretiers*, or publicans.

Nor is the variety of political groups hardly less noteworthy than that of rank or calling. Here are the different parties represented in the present Chamber: Republican, qualified by the following terms—radical, revolutionary, revisionist, nationalist, anti-ministerial, *plebiscitaire*, *antisemite*, moderate, socialist, progressive, liberal, independant, Catholic, conservative, radical-socialist, socialist-collectivist,



Christian-revisionist, Blanquists, patriote-revolutionary, independent, parliamentary, and a further group under the head of *action liberal*.

Among the miscellaneous labels we find adherents of the *Union démocratique* and of the *Appel au Peuple*, royalist, Liberal Right Conservative, Conservative *rallie*, *Nationalist plébiscitaire*, *anti-semite*, and members of the *Réforme Parlementaire*. Thus composed, it might seem matter for wonder, not that the Chamber of Deputies is so often a scene of wildly divergent opinion, rather that concord should ever reign within its walls. We must bear in mind Thiers' famous axiom. The Republic is the form of government that divides Frenchmen the least. The French temperament is naturally far too critical to be satisfied with anything. The critical faculty dominates every other.

It strikes an English observer oddly to discern tonsured heads and priestly robes on the legislator's bench at the Quai d'Orsay. In England our ecclesiastic must become to all intents and purposes a civilian before entering the House of Commons.

Not so in France. From the assemblage of the *Tiers État* until our own day ministers of religion have been elected as parliamentary representatives. In 1789 some of the leading spirits of the National Assembly were Protestant pastors. A priest, the celebrated Abbé Grégoire, voted for extension of civil rights to Jews and the abolition of slavery throughout the French dominions.

Ministers of the Reformed faith no longer seek election as parliamentary representatives ; but Catholic priests have not as yet followed their example. The priest does not unfrock himself when he dons the tricolour badge ; he retains his ecclesiastical character, but forfeits the stipend of *abbé* or *vicaire*. Candidates for the legislature are generally what is called *prêtres libres*, that is to say, men who have held no sacerdotal office paid for by the State.

Two priests sit in the present Chamber ; the first of

these, the Abbé Gayraud, who describes himself as a *Républicain Catholique*,\* represents a constituency of Brest, was formerly professor of theology and scholastic philosophy at the Catholic University of Toulouse. The second, the Abbé Lemrie, represents an electoral division of Hazebrouch (Nord), and was also formerly a professor in the *Institution St. François d'Assise* of that town. A Christian Socialist, the abbé has written many works on the subject.

When it is considered that the fee of a country doctor is two francs, we need hardly wonder that, irrespective of other considerations, the practice of medicine is frequently exchanged for politics. No less than fifty-three doctors sit in the actual Chamber, many of these being former mayors of their town or commune, many also authors of medical works. One eccentric figure of the Chamber in 1897 was a certain Dr. Granier, member for Pontarlier. This gentleman had been converted to Mohammedanism in Algeria, and before entering the Palais, by performing the ablutions prescribed by ritual in the Seine. The doctor was somewhat ruthlessly unseated for preaching teetotalism. As an orthodox follower of Islam, probably also as an enlightened philanthropist, he began a veritable crusade against alcoholism. As the electorate of his *arrondissement* consisted largely of absinthe distillers and their work-people, the result might have been foreseen.

Chemists to the number of eight keep science in countenance; journalism is represented by forty-one members; the army by forty-two retired officers; and no less than a hundred and seventy-three *avocats*, *avoués*, and *notaires* represent the law. Surely in no other parliament are so many legists got together!

If medicine and the law are occasionally renounced in favour of politics as a profession, it would seem that legal and medical parliamentarians are generally men of local distinction or prominence. Most often a long string of

\* See "Nos Députés," Paris, 1904.

dignities and titles follows their name ; they are, or have been, *préfets*, mayors, *conseillers généraux*, presidents of commercial associations and societies, political, artistic, and philanthropic ; many are also authors.

The same may be said of the numerous landed proprietors sitting in the Chamber—one and all seem busiest of the busy, to have earned their seats by the performance of unremitting local services.

The Reformed Church, as I have said, is no longer represented in the Palais Bourbon. As in the little handbook before named denominations are not given, I have no means of apportioning the sum-total under the heads of Catholic, Protestant, or Jew.

It may be asked, “Do French people uphold the payment of members?” My reply is, “Not all.” On this subject a friend over the water lately expressed himself to me in somewhat strong terms. Politics, he averred, should not be regarded in the light of a profession, a livelihood. It may not be generally known that the senators are in receipt of deputy’s pay, that is to say, three hundred and sixty pounds a year.

In one respect certainly they manage these things better in France. A sitting of the Chamber can be as much enjoyed by ladies as by the other sex. Stuffiness on hot days within its walls reminds one of the House of Commons, but in this respect onlookers are no worse off than legislators. The accommodation for visitors, especially lady visitors, is generous in the extreme.

The interior of the Palais Bourbon is an amphitheatre, galleries for visitors and members’ pens or boxes facing the orators’ tribunes, President’s chair and table above. The two galleries, running to right and left, are divided into *loges*, or boxes, each holding about a dozen people, and the two first rows are gallantly reserved for ladies. Seated at our ease we undoubtedly are, but as on especially interesting occasions gentlemen are freely admitted to standing

room behind these *loges*, the atmosphere becomes stifling. But the discomfort is amply rewarded even on uneventful days. On the occasion of my own visit in 1900 it was M. Paul Deschanel, *le beau Deschanel*, as he was called, whose office it was to occupy the Presidential chair, constantly ring his big silver bell, and, failing that expedient, to hammer on the table with a ruler and shout, "Le silence, le silence, s'il vous plait."

Nothing of great interest or importance was going on, but the heat was torrid. Members very likely wanted to have their say and rush off to the Exhibition; anyhow, M. Paul Deschanel's silver bell and his ruler were perpetually in request. Below the Presidential table and the orator's tribune were grouped the ushers, tall, gentlemanly looking individuals in blue dress-coats, wearing silver chains of office and swords.

Votes are taken by members first holding up their hands affirmatively, next negatively, the voting urns being only used when important measures are proposed. These urns are then handed round to the deputies by the ushers as they sit in their places, the results being afterwards made known by the President.

The handsome Palais Bourbon was begun by Girardini, an Italian, in 1722, for the Duchess of Bourbon, and completed and enlarged by French architects a century later. The interior is well worth visiting in detail.

The present Chamber, eighth legislative body of the Third Republic, was elected in April, 1902, and on June 1 was composed the so-called *bureau d'âge*, the president being the oldest deputy present. If Frenchwomen ever obtain seats in the Palais Bourbon, this dignity will certainly be abolished. The actual president of the *bureau d'âge* is eighty-two.

It may here be mentioned that under no previous form of government has suffrage been both universal and direct. During the various parliamentary *régimes* of the Revolution,

as M. Rambaud points out, manhood suffrage existed, but with certain restrictions. Under the Consulate and the first Empire freedom of vote ceased to exist, the so-called representatives of the people being mere nominees of the Government.

The Restoration and July monarchy allowed a restricted parliamentary franchise only, whilst the system of official candidatures under the second Empire nullified what was nominally manhood suffrage. I add that in 1870 electoral rights were granted to the Jews of Algeria. As is seen in another chapter, the legislation of the last twenty years has been eminently progressive, especially with regard to education. There is, indeed, henceforth to be an educational fête held yearly in Paris, a second anniversary certainly no less worthy of commemoration than July 14.

On June 19, 1872, was presented to the assembly, then sitting at Versailles, a petition signed by over a million citizens, for free, universal, and non-sectarian education. Ten years later the great Ferry laws carried out this programme in its entirety. The former date was lately celebrated in the Trocadéro with great *éclat*, the President of the Republic and the Minister of Public Instruction being present at the inauguration.

Thus Lex henceforth is to have a deservedly foremost place in the Republican calendar.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE OFFICER

ON a certain day during the Carnot Presidency, the aspect of French streets changed as if by magic. Squads of raw recruits in their economical, oft-times ill-fitting uniforms still met the eye, but the highly decorative and becoming képi,\* tunic, and red pantaloons were gone. A stroke of the pen at the War Office had suddenly robbed outdoor scenes of a traditionally national and picturesque element. No more than in England were we now perpetually reminded of armed peace. If the new regulation allowing officers to wear civilian dress when off duty somewhat eclipsed the gaiety of nations, we may be sure it was warmly welcomed by the army. How agreeable, for instance, in hot weather to don a light grey English-made suit and straw hat! What a relief, that freedom from constantly recurring salute and the necessary acknowledgment! The French officer of to-day, moreover, is as little like insular conception of him as can well be. Is he not pictured as a light-hearted, inconsequent, dashing fellow, a something of the D'Artagnan, a something of the Charles O'Malley about him, professional duties sitting lightly upon his shoulders, domestic cares quite shaken off? True to life were a directly opposite portrait—that of an indefatigable worker, one to whom fireside joys and

\* Oddly enough, this word is of German origin, from the old German *Kacppi*, diminutive of *Kappe*, "a cap." Képi was accepted by the Académie in 1878.



intellectual pleasures are especially dear, and to whom self-abnegation in the loftiest as well as the domestic sense becomes a second nature.

I should say that in no class of French society more pre-eminently shine the virtues of forethought and disinterestedness. The first-mentioned quality — namely, thrift—if not inherent, is implanted by his position. Indebtedness is impossible to a French officer. From pecuniary embarrassments and involvements with money-lenders he is guarded by a code almost Draconian in its severity. Even before the reorganization of the army in 1872 an officer could not contract debts. A first infringement of this law entails a reprimand. Should the debts remain unpaid, the offender is suspended by the Minister of War for three years. At the end of that period he is summoned before a commission of five members, one of whom holds the same rank as himself. This commission, after the strictest investigation, has power to decide whether or no reinstatement is permissible. It will, of course, sometimes happen that the verdict means disgrace and a ruined career. But the uncompromising, unassailable solvency of the French army is without doubt a tremendous element of its moral strength.

The D'Artagnan phase of military life is usually short-lived. After a few years more or less gaily and perhaps boisterously spent in Algeria, Tonquin, or Senegal, an officer returns to France and takes a wife. Wedded to domestic life and tenacious of the dignity implied in the designation *père de famille* are members of the French army. In no class are these privileges often more dearly purchased. Take the case, for instance, of a captain without any private means whatever, and whose bride brings him a small dowry; their two incomes put together perhaps bring in something under three hundred pounds a year. Seeing the dearness of living in France, the necessity of keeping up appearances, and the liability to frequent

removal from place to place, it is easy to understand the obligation of strict economy. Until recent years an officer could not wed a portionless bride, much less into a family without irreproachable antecedents. The young lady must not only have possessed capital bringing in an income of about fifty pounds yearly; her parents or guardians must furnish the military authorities with strict guarantees of respectability and decorum. Such regulations formed no part of the Code Civil, but emanated from the War Office, and although they are now rescinded, an officer must still obtain the sanction of the Minister before contracting matrimony. The army as a profession being held in high esteem, officers of rank can always make brilliant marriages, but as a rule they only know one ambition, that the noblest of all, namely, how best to serve their country. They may not feel particularly enthusiastic about the powers that be. Drastically critical they are necessarily, being Frenchmen. No matter individual predilections or antipathies, the honour of France is ever before their eyes; patriotism, in the august sense of the word, with them is a veritable religion.

In the new volume of his monumental work, "La France contemporaine," M. Hanotaux strikingly brings out this characteristic. Marshal MacMahon was a Legitimist at heart, democratic institutions were uncongenial, perhaps even hateful to him, but when President of the French Republic, he was begged by the Comte de Chambord to visit him secretly, the *soi-disant Roi* being then in hiding at Versailles, his reply was an unhesitating "My life is at the Comte de Chambord's service, but not my honour."

But indeed for the fine old soldier's attitude upon that occasion, events might have turned out very differently, and France would have been again plunged in the horrors of civil war. As M. Hanotaux remarked, the country hitherto has little known what she owes him.

Bluff, simple-minded, monosyllabic commanders after the marshal's pattern, rough, unscrupulous, swashbucklers of Pellissier's type belonged to their epoch. The French officer of to-day is pre-eminently intellectual, to be best characterized by that word.

If a brilliant young captain works harder than any other professional man anxious to rise to the top, the same may be averred of those in exalted positions. Many superior officers never dream of taking, or rather demanding, a holiday, and with the constantly widening area of military science more arduous become their duties and more absorbing their pursuits.

The strain on physique equals that on brains. An artillery captain is as much tied to daily routine as his comrade in the bureau.

I well remember a month spent at Clermont-Ferrand. I had gone thither to be near a friend, the accomplished young wife of an artillery captain. During my stay the heat was tropical in Auvergne ; but, all the same, regiments were drafted off for artillery practice on the plain below the Puy-de-Dôme in the hottest part of the day. Only those men who have been hardened by an African sun can stand such an ordeal with impunity. The French soldier laughs, sings, and makes merry ; but often a hard lot is his ! One day my hostess and myself were driven with other ladies to witness the firing, resting under the shadow of a rock. When it was all over, my friend's husband galloped up, hot, tired, and dusty, but gay, neat, and composed. He conducted us to the temporary quarters erected for himself and his brother-officers ; and, whilst we sipped sirop water, he restored his spent forces by two large glasses of vermouth, taken neat. This powerful restorative had the desired effect. He declared himself none the worse for his many hours' exposure to the blazing sun. A sojourn in Senegal had rendered him sunproof, he added.

I have said that officers in command get little in the

way of holiday. One kind of change, often a very undesirable one, is entailed upon them by their profession. French officers are hardly more of a fixture in times of peace than of war. Agreeably settled in some pleasant town and mild climate one year, a captain or commandant may be shifted to a frigid zone the next, the transport of wife and children, goods and chattels being the least inconvenience. A brilliant officer I knew well thus fell a victim to patriotic duty as completely as any hero killed on the battlefield. Removed from a station of south-west France to the arctic region of Upper Savoy, there amid perpetual snows to supervise military works, he contracted acute sciatica. He might, of course, have begged for an exchange on the plea of impaired health ; but no ! *Il faut vaincre ou mourir*, "conquer or die," is the motto of such men. Winter after winter he kept his post, struggling against disease ; finally, obliged to retire upon half-pay, he dragged out a painful year or two, dying in the prime of life. Such instances are numerous, true heroism therein shining more conspicuously than in the chronicles of so-called glorious campaigns.

Hard-worked as he is, the French officer always finds time to serve his friends. No matter his circumstances, he is lavishly hospitable. With what grace and cordiality will he do the honours of a station however remote ! How charmingly will drawbacks be got over ! I recollect an incident illustrating the latter remark. Many years ago I was travelling with four friends in Algeria. When we arrived at Teniet-el-Haad, a captain to whom we had a letter of introduction carried us off to a hastily improvised dinner, his young wife gracefully doing the honours, and several fellow-officers and their ladies being invited to meet us. We were seated at table, and the Kabyle servant had just entered with the soup, when, by an unlucky jerk, he tipped it over, every one jumping up to avoid the steaming hot cascade. "*Il faut se passer de notre*

*potage alors*," "We must do without our soup, then," was all our host said, smiling as he spoke; and with equal coolness and good-nature Hamet took his discomfiture.

Many other illustrations I could cite in point did space permit. "Where there's a will there's a way," is a motto an officer holds to, taking no account of trouble, fatigue, or expense, in his person royally representing the noble French army, doing the honours of France.

Geniality, serviceableness, simplicity, an immense capacity for enjoyment, that is to say, reciprocated enjoyment, these are among the lighter graces of national temperament. We must go deeper if we would appraise a body of men less generally known in England than perhaps any other of their country people. French statesmen, scientists, representatives of art, industry, and commerce now happily find themselves at home among us. Is it too much to hope that at no distant period the *entente cordiale* may bring French soldiers into intimate contact with their English comrades-in-arms?



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

TWO country doctors of France, I doubt not, are familiar to most folks. Who has not read Balzac's moving apotheosis of a humble practitioner, the story of the good Monsieur Benassis, "our father," as the villagers called him?

And who has not read Flaubert's *roman*,<sup>1</sup> *nécessaire*, the necessary novel some critic has misnamed it, a picture of life equalling in ugliness the beauty of the other? Charles Bovary, the heavy, plodding, matter-of-fact country doctor, interests us from a single point of view; the misfortunes brought upon him by his union with a middle-class Messalina. Balzac's hero is perhaps a rare type in any country; Charbovari, so in youth Flaubert's doctor called himself, must be set down as an uncommon specimen in France. Frenchmen, like ourselves, may dazzle us with their shining qualities, or put humanity to the blush by their vices; stupidity is not a Gallic foible.

Another thing we may also take for granted: whether a Benassis or a Charbovari, no man works harder than the French provincial doctor. When Balzac put the colophon to "Le Médecin de Campagne" in 1833, and, twenty-seven years later, Flaubert brought out "Madame Bovary," country doctors in France were few and far between. The rural practitioner was most often the nun. Even where qualified medical skill was available, the peasants preferred to go to the *bonnes sœurs*. I well remember, when staying

with friends in Anjou many years ago, a visit we paid to a village convent. One of the sisters, a rough and ready but capable-looking woman, began speaking of her medical rounds. "Good heavens, how busy I am!" she said. "Just now every soul in the place wants putting to rights."\* And she evidently put them to rights with a vengeance. There were drugs enough in her little parlour to stock an apothecary's shop; and as many of the nuns are excellent herbalists, for ordinary ailments I have no doubt they prove efficient.

If at any time you visit village folks, the first thing they do is to introduce you to the *bonnes sœurs*. When staying at the charming little village of Nant in the Aveyron, the mistress of our comfortable inn immediately carried me off on a visit of ceremony to the convent. The mother-superior was evidently a medical authority in the place, and in order to supply her pharmacopœia, had yearly collections made of all the medicinal plants growing round about. Here on the floor of a chamber exposed to sun and air were stores of wild lavender for sweetening the linen-presses, mallows, gentian, elder-flowers, poppies, leaves of the red vine and limes, with vast heaps of the *Veronica officinalis*, or *thé des Alpes*, as it is called in France, and many others. That excellent little work, Dr. Saffray's "Remèdes des Champs," had apparently been got by heart.

But it was not only the peasants who resorted, and still resort, to the convent instead of the surgery, as the following story will show. A few years ago I was visiting rich *vignerons* in Burgundy, when their cook was severely bitten by a sporting dog. Several of these dogs were allowed to run loose in a yard adjoining the kitchen; and one day, thinking that they wanted no more of the food set down for them, poor old Justine imprudently lifted a half-emptied bowl. In a second the animal in question,

\* Her words were these: "Mon Dieu, que je suis affairée! Dans ce moment-ci tout le monde a besoin d'être purgé."

a very handsome and powerful creature, had pinned her to the ground. The housemaid, hearing her fellow-servant's cries, rushed out with a broomstick and beat off the assailant, not before he had fearfully lacerated the woman's arm. Was a doctor sent for? Not a bit of it. The nuns took my old friend Justine in hand, and, being sound in body and mind, she was soon at work again, no whit worse for the misadventure. It did seem to me astonishing that the matter should not have been taken more seriously, all the more so as M. Pasteur's name just then was in everybody's mouth. What I quite expected was that Justine, under the care of a nun, would have been despatched to Paris, there to undergo Pasteurian treatment. Very likely she fared better at home. And as things fell out in Goldsmith's poem, "the dog it was that died." Poor Figaro showed no signs of madness; but it was deemed unwise to keep so fierce-tempered a creature about the place, and he was shot.

When more than a quarter of a century ago I spent a year in Brittany and Anjou, I constantly heard it asserted that the nuns starved out the country doctors. Where the choice lay between nun and doctor, the peasants, alike the well-to-do and the needy, would prefer to go to the former, as often the handier and always the cheaper. Provided with a bishop's *lettre d'obédience*, the *bonnes sœurs* were much in the position of our own bone-setters, barber-surgeons, and unqualified medical assistants long since prohibited by law. Legislation in France and progressive ideas have now changed all this, and made the profession of country doctor fairly remunerative. But not till July, 1893, was a law passed assuring gratuitous medical services to the indigent poor, the doctors being paid respectively by the State, the department, and the communes. The term "indigent poor" must be understood as an equivalent to our own poor in receipt of poor-relief. Medicines are not supplied gratuitously.

Oddly enough, doctors' fees in provincial France are no higher than they were thirty years ago. So far back as 1875, whilst passing through Brest, the maritime capital of Brittany, I needed treatment for passing indisposition. To my amazement, the doctor's fee was two francs only. On my mentioning the matter to the French friend who was with me, she replied that two francs a visit was the usual charge in provincial towns and in the country. And quite enough, too, she said. And a year or two ago I was taken ill at a little town of Champagne. Here, as at Brest, the usual medical fee was two francs a visit, not a centime higher than it had been more than a quarter of a century before. Yet the price of living has greatly risen throughout France since the Franco-Prussian war. How, then, do country doctors contrive to make ends meet? "Oh," retorted my hostess, "we have three doctors here; they have as much as they can do, and are all rich."

There are two explanations of this speech. In the first place, the town contains three thousand inhabitants, thus allotting a thousand to each practitioner;\* in the second place, the word "rich" is susceptible of divers interpretations. The French lady, who always travelled first-class because she was rich, was rich because most likely she never spent more than a hundred and fifty of two hundred; and the same explanation, I dare say, applies to the three medical men in this little country town. They were rich, in all probability, on three or four hundred a year—rich just because they made double that they spent.

In order to comprehend French life and character we must bear one fact in mind. Appearance is not a fetich in France as in England; outside show is not sacrificed to; Mrs. Grundy is no twentieth-century Baal. On the other hand, good repute is sedulously nursed; personal

\* In M. de Foville's "*La France Économique*" (1900), he gives 11,643 as the number of medical men in France, the population being over thirty-eight millions.

dignity and family honour are hedged round with respect. We must not take the so-called realistic novelist's standard to be the true one. Frenchmen, I should say, as a rule spend a third less upon dress than Englishmen. It does not follow that the individual is held in slight esteem, personality thereby discounted. These provincial and country doctors do not outwardly resemble their spick-and-span English colleagues, nor do they affect what is called style in their equipages—in most cases the conveyance is a bicycle—and manner of living. How can they do so upon an income derived from one-and-eight-penny fees? But many are doubtless rich in the logical acceptance of the word—that is, they live considerably below their income, and save money. Unostentatious as is their manner of living, the status of country doctor is greatly changed since Flaubert wrote his *roman nécessaire*.

There is one highly suggestive scene in "Madame Bovary." Husband and wife have arrived at the marquis's château for the ball, and whilst the ambitious Emma puts on her barège dress, Charles remarks that the straps of his trousers will be in the way whilst dancing. "Dancing?" exclaims Emma. "Yes." "You must be crazy," retorts the little *bourgeoise*; "everybody will make fun of you. Keep your place. Besides," she added, "it is more becoming in a doctor not to dance."

Now, in the first place, you would not nowadays find among the eleven thousand and odd medical men in France a *lourdaud*, or heavy, loutish fellow after the pattern of poor Charles Bovary. Higher attainments, increased facilities of social intercourse, and progress generally in France as elsewhere have rendered certain types obsolete. In the second place, every Frenchman at the present time can dance well, and I should have said it was so when Flaubert wrote. And, thirdly, a country doctor and his wife would not in these days lose their heads at being invited to a marquis's château. Thirty-five years of



democratic institutions have lent the social colouring of this novel historic interest.

There is one whimsical trait in the French country doctor. He does not relish being paid for his services. The difficulty in dealing with him is the matter of remuneration, by what roundabout contrivance to transfer his two-franc fees from your pocket to his own. It is my firm belief that French doctors, if it were practicable, would infinitely prefer to attend rich patients as they do the poor, for nothing. Take the case of my last-mentioned medical attendant, for instance. On arriving at the little Champenois town I unfortunately fell ill, and Dr. B. was in close attendance upon me for many days. "Ne vous tourmentez pas" ("Do not be uneasy"), Dr. B. reiterated when, as my departure drew near, I ventured to ask for his bill. A second attempt to settle the little matter only evoked the same, "Ne vous tourmentez pas;" and when the morning for setting out came, it really seemed as if I must leave my debt behind me. At the last moment, however, just as I was about to start for the station, up came the doctor's maid-of-all-work, or rather working-housekeeper, breathless and flustered, with the anxiously expected account. On my hostess handing her the sum, just a pound, the good woman turned it over in her palm, exclaiming, "My! How these doctors make money, to be sure!" Upon another occasion the same reluctance was even more divertingly manifested. I was staying with French friends in Germanized France, and had called in a young French doctor. My hostesses begged me on no account whatever to proffer money; he would be much hurt by such a proceeding, they said. So before I left one of the ladies wrote a note at my request, enclosing the customary fee, and making a quite apologetic demand for his acceptance of the same.

Half a dozen provincial doctors I have known in France, and if not guardian angels of humanity, veritable apostles

of the healing art like Balzac's hero, one and all might serve as worthy types. Small is the number lifted by chance or ambition into more exalted spheres, laborious the round of duty, modest the guerdon. Yet no class does more honour to France. The country doctor, moreover, forms a link between peasant and *bourgeois*, an intermediary bridging over social distinctions, linking two classes not always sympathetic. A distinctive feature of French rural life, it is a pity that the *médecin de campagne* is so persistently ignored by contemporary novelists over the water.

## CHAPTER XV

### MY FRIEND MONSIEUR LE CURÉ

IT is curious how insignificant a part the parish priest plays in French fiction. One novel oftentimes proves the germ of another, and Balzac's little masterpiece, "Le Curé de Tours," as we now know, suggested what is not only the masterpiece of another writer, but the only great French romance having a priest for hero. "L'Abbé Tigrane," by the late Ferdinand Fabre, belongs to a series of powerful ecclesiastical studies which stand absolutely alone. All readers who wish to realize clerical life in France from the topmost rung to the bottom of the ladder must acquaint themselves with this not too numerous collection.

Such general neglect is all the more difficult to understand, since the priest constitutes an integral portion of family life in France; the confessor is indeed in some sort a member of the household. Be his part exalted or lowly, whether he occupies a lofty position alike in the Church and in the world, or in a remote village is counted rich on forty pounds a year, the relation between priest and parishioner is the same, one of constant intercourse and closest intimacy, with, of course, exceptions. Here and there are Socialist and anti-clerical circles from which any representative of sacerdotalism is excluded. These, however, are uncommon cases.

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that there

is no analogy whatever between the status of a French curé and a clergyman of the Church of England.

Strictly speaking, there is no State Church in France. It was during the reign of Louis Philippe that the words *religion de l'État* were struck out of the charter by the Chamber of Deputies, *la religion de la majorité des Français* being placed in their stead. The French Government acknowledges and subsidizes in equal proportion four religions—namely, the Roman Catholic, the Protestant, the Jewish, and in Algeria the Mohammedan ; though it must be remembered that there are about thirty Catholics to one Protestant, and there are only about fifty synagogues in all France. The Protestant pastor, indeed, receives higher pay than the Catholic priest ; being the father of a family, he is understood to want a better income. Whenever a Protestant temple, Jewish synagogue, or in Algeria a new mosque is built, the State makes a grant precisely as in the case of a Catholic church.

No peasant-born, illiterate, boorish wearer of the *soutane* was my friend Monsieur le curé. Formerly professor at a seminary, learned, genial, versed in the usages of society, how came such a man to be planted in an out-of-the-way commune of eastern France, numbering a few hundred souls only, and these, with the exception of the *Juge de Paix*, all belonging to the peasant class ?

The mystery was afterwards cleared up. The highly cultivated and influential residents of the château situated at some distance from the village were on good terms with the bishop of the diocese. As it was their custom to spend five months of the year in the country, they depended somewhat upon the curé for society, and Monseigneur had obligingly made an exchange. A somewhat heavy, uneducated priest was sent elsewhere, and hither came Monsieur le curé in his place. Agreeable intercourse, unlimited hospitality, and sympathetic parochial co-operation during five months of the year doubtless went far to







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compensate for isolation during the remaining seven. Yet, taking these advantages into consideration, how modest such a sphere of action, how apparently inadequate its remuneration!

M. le curé's yearly stipend was just sixty pounds, in addition to which he received a good house, garden, and paddock, about half an acre in all, and the usual ecclesiastical fees, called *le casuel*, the latter perhaps bringing his receipts to a hundred pounds a year. As the patrimony of both rich and poor is rigidly divided amongst sons and daughters in France, it may be that this village priest enjoyed a small private income. In any case, only devotion to his calling could render the position enviable.

When I made his acquaintance, M. le curé was in the prime of life, too florid, too portly perhaps, for health, but possessing a striking and benignant presence. Extremely fastidious as he was in personal matters, his *soutane* was ever well brushed, his muslin lappets spotless, the silver buckles of his shoes highly polished. Nor less was he careful in clothing his thoughts, always expressing himself choicely and with perfect intonation. During my repeated visits to the hospitable château I renewed an acquaintance which finally ripened into friendship. At the dinner-table the conversation would, of course, be general; but whenever he called in the afternoon we invariably had a long theological discussion, never losing temper on either side, and, I need hardly say, never changing each other's way of looking at things by so much as a hair-breadth. Upon other occasions everyday topics would come up, M. le curé showing the liveliest interest in matters lying wholly outside his especial field of thought and action.

It will happen that such cosmopolitan tastes are sometimes hampered even in these days by episcopal authority. A village priest has not much money to spare upon books or newspapers, and the *châtelaine* used to send frequent supplies of these to the presbytery. One evening, as he

was leaving after dinner, she gave him a bundle of the *Figaro*, a newspaper without which no reading Frenchman or Frenchwoman can support existence, and which costs twopence daily. As he tied up the parcel he turned to his hostess, saying with a smile—

“I shall take great care, madame, not to let my bishop catch sight of these numbers of the *Figaro*.”

It seemed odd that a middle-aged priest could not choose his own newspaper ; but was not the immortal Mrs. Proudie capable of rating a curate for a less offence than smuggling a forbidden journal ?

With the benevolent intention of bettering his circumstances, the *châtelaine* advised her friend to take an English pupil or two. In order that I might be able to furnish any information required of an outsider, M. le curé showed me over his house. A well-built, commodious house it was, and the large fruit and vegetable garden bespoke excellent husbandry.

“You occasionally amuse yourself here, I suppose, M. le curé ?” I asked, knowing that many parish priests are very good gardeners.

“No, indeed,” was the reply. “My servant keeps it in order. Ah ! she is a good girl” (*une bonne fille*).

This good girl was a stout, homely spinster between fifty and sixty ; but, no matter her age, a spinster is always *une fille* in the French language. Cook, laundry-maid, seamstress, housekeeper, gardener, M. le curé’s *bonne fille* must have well earned her wages, whatever they might be.

My friend had enjoyed unusual opportunities of travel for a village priest. He had visited, perhaps in an official capacity, Ober-Ammergau, witnessing the Passion Play, with which he was delighted ; Lourdes, in the miracles of which he firmly believed ; and, lastly, Rome.

The most charitably disposed man in the world, M. le curé dilated with positive acerbity on the slovenliness and

uncared-for appearance of his Italian brethren. "I assure you," he said to me, "I have seen a priest's *soutane* so greasy that boiled down it would have made a thick soup!"

But is not the French curé rich by comparison with an Italian *prêtre*, and might not such well-worn robes be thought a matter of necessity rather than inclination?

M. le curé's thoughts were now bent upon London. There was only one point on which he had misgivings. Could he without inconvenience retain his priestly garb? French priests never quit the *soutane*, and on the settlement of this doubt depended his decision.

"Nothing would induce me to don civilian dress," he said—"nothing in the world."

I assured him that, although in England ecclesiastical habiliments had long gone out of fashion, English folks were peaceful, and he was not likely to be molested on that account. To London a little later accordingly he went. Indefatigably piloted by English friends, he contrived during his three days' stay to see what generally goes by the name of everything—the Tower, St. Paul's, the Abbey, the museums, parks, and civic monuments, winding up with an evening at the House of Commons. And the wearing of the *soutane* occasioned no inconvenience.

I must here explain that by virtue of his age M. le curé had escaped military service, now in France, as in Germany, an obligation alike of seminarists, students preparing for the Protestant ordination, or the Jewish priesthood. In case of war French seminarists would be employed in the ambulance, hospital, and commissariat departments, and not obliged to use arms.

That journey was M. le curé's last holiday. A few months later I was grieved, although not greatly surprised, to hear of his death from apoplexy. He had never looked like a man in good health, and one part of his duty had ever tried him greatly.



We used after mass to say "How d'ye do?" to him in the sacristy, and upon one occasion I observed his look of fatigue, even prostration.

"It is not the long standing and use of the voice that I feel, but protracted long fasts," he replied, with a sigh.

With many other parish priests I have made passing acquaintance, most of these being peasant-born and having little interest in the outer world. Whenever any kind of entertainment is given by country residents, or any unusual delicacy is about to be served, the curé is invited to partake. The naïveté of these worthy men is often diverting enough. When I was staying in a country house near Dijon some years since, my hostess had prepared a local rarity in the shape of a game *pâté*, or open pie, a vast dish lined with pastry and filled with every variety of game in season—partridge, quail, pheasant, hare, venison, and, I believe, even slices of wild boar. This savoury mess naturally called for the exercise of hospitality. The curé and his nephew were invited, and after dinner I had a little chat with the uncle.

"Who will succeed the Queen on the throne of England?" he asked.

I should have thought that not a man or woman in France, however unlettered, would have been ignorant of the Prince of Wales's existence and his position.

Many village priests, as I have mentioned, are excellent gardeners. One afternoon some French friends in the Seine-et-Marne, wanting some dessert and preserving fruit, took me with them to the presbytery of a neighbouring village. Very inviting looked the place with its vine-covered walls and wealth of flowers. The curé, who told us that he had been at work in his garden from four to six o'clock in the morning, received us in quite a business-like way, yet very courteously, and at once conducted us to his fruit and vegetable gardens at some little distance from the house. There we found the greatest profusion and



evidence of labour and unremitting skill. The fruit-trees were laden ; Alpine strawberries, currants, melons, apricots, were in abundance ; of vegetables, also, there was a splendid show. Nor were flowers wanting for the bees—for M. le curé was also a bee-keeper—double sunflowers, mallows, gladioli ; a score of hives completing the picture, which the owner contemplated with pardonable pride.

“You have only just given your orders in time, ladies,” he said. “All my greengages are to be gathered at once for the London market. Ah, those English ! those English ! they take the best of everything.”

Whereupon I ventured upon the rejoinder that if we robbed our neighbours of their best produce, at least our money found its way into their pockets. I need hardly say that, whether lettered or unlettered, the parish priest in France is generally anti-Republican and out of sympathy with existing institutions. Most friendly I have ever found him, and from one good curé near Nancy I have a standing invitation to make his *presbytère* my *pied à terre* when next that way.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PROTESTANT PASTOR

UNDER the roof of more than one French parsonage during the summer holidays I have found, as Bunyan wrote, "harbour and good company." On one sojourn of this kind do I look back with especial pleasure, that of September days in a Pyrenean hamlet. So near lies this little Protestant centre to the Spanish frontier that a bridle-path leads over the mountains into Aragon, the ride occupying three or four hours. I had journeyed with a friend from Pau, quitting the railway at Oloron (Basses Pyrenees), to enjoy a sixteen-mile drive, one of the loveliest of the countless lovely drives I have taken in France.

As we climbed the mountain road leading to our destination in the beautiful Vallée d'Aspe every turn revealed new features, a *garve*, or mountain stream, after the manner of Pyrenean streams, making noisy cascades, waterfalls, and little whirlpools by the way. On either side of the broadening velvety green valley, with its foamy, turbulent river, rose an array of stately peaks, here and there a glittering white thread breaking the dark surface of the rock, some mountain torrent falling from a height of many hundred or even thousand feet. After winding slowly upwards for three hours, the mountains closed round us abruptly, shutting in a wide verdant valley with white-walled, grey-roofed hamlets scattered here and there, all singularly alike. Half an hour

more on the level, and we found ourselves not only in a pleasant, cheerful house, but at home, as if we had suddenly dropped upon old friends.

The parsonage-house, of somewhat greater pretensions than its neighbours, with church and school house, might almost be said to form one building, each of the three structures communicating with the other. On one side of the dwelling lay a little garden, or rather orchard, with seats under the trees. Three-storeyed, airy, roomy, the house suggested that palladium of the Reformed Church, family life, and at the same time attested the impartiality of the French State. As I have elsewhere particularized, there is no State or privileged church in France. Alike Protestant pastor, Jewish Rabbi, and in Algeria, Mohammedan Imam, receive stipends and accommodation, as well as the Catholic clergy.

When, after tea and a rest in our comfortable bedrooms, we joined the family board at dinner, we found a goodly assemblage, upwards of a dozen covers being laid. The presence of two other boarders accounted for the ample fare, excellent service, and an air of pervading comfort. But, as I have just said, we at once felt at home. Protestantism has ever been a kind of freemasonry, an anticipatory *entente cordiale* between French and English. Anglo-French marriages are chiefly, I am tempted to say, exclusively, found among Protestant circles in France. Of eight pastors I have known, four were wedded to English wives.

Partly owing to other circumstance, a parsonage, unlike the majority of French homes, is not hedged round by a Chinese wall. When young people from England or Scandinavia want to perfect themselves in French and see something of French family life, the only doors open to them are those of the *presbytère*.

Judicial as is the French Government in dealing with ministers of religion, a pastor's pay cannot support a family.

The pupil, the boarder, swell the domestic budget, cover servants' wages, and defray educational expenses.

Here the domestic atmosphere was one of well-being. A very genial and animated party we were, the family group numbering four boys and a girl, with the host's brother, like himself a minister. In addition to these were two young men pursuing their studies during the long vacation. One was a French law-student, the other a Spanish ex-seminarist, who had renounced Rome and was preparing for Protestant ministry.

In the forenoon Monsieur C—— would be busy with his pupils, madame and her sixteen-year-old daughter, wearing little mob-caps and aprons, would occupy themselves in household matters, their visitors could read or write abroad, having ever before them a grandiose panorama, on either side "the everlasting hills," ramparts of brilliant green, their slopes dotted with herdsmen's *châlet* and shepherd's hut. The mention of these recalls to memory a moving and highly suggestive incident.

One day, on taking my place at the breakfast or rather luncheon table, I missed our host and his eldest son, a lad of fifteen.

Madame C——, when we found ourselves alone, took the opportunity of explaining this absence. "My husband, with Ernest, set off at five o'clock this morning for the mountain yonder," she said, pointing to the highest points of the range over against us. "The lad has an ardent desire to enter the ministry, and wanted some quiet talk with his father on the subject. My husband, for his part, as you can well conceive, was anxious to assure himself that the desire is no passing fancy, but a really devout aspiration. So the pair are going to have two days' communion together, sharing at night the hospitality of a friendly herdsman. I expect them back to-morrow evening."

It seemed to me a beautiful incident, this setting out of father and son for the mountain, on that awful height,

amid those vast solitudes, as it were under the very eye of Heaven, taking counsel together, coming to the most momentous decision of a young life. If I remember rightly, the pastorate was decided upon. Another incident, this time of an amusing kind, I must mention.

In this pastoral region, sixteen miles from a railway, we certainly expected to find no country-people except under the pastor's roof. But the ubiquitous British, where are they not?

Here at the other end of the village, a retired Anglo-Indian with his wife and family had settled down, as the way of English folks is, surrounding themselves with as many comforts as could be got, bringing, indeed, an atmosphere of home. The one bourgeois dwelling of the place wore quite a familiar aspect when in the evening we all trooped thither, tea, chat, and table games being shared by young and old. It is amazing how the English teapot brings out the genial side, the human side of us all!

My host was especially happy in his church and in his people; *mes enfants* he affectionately called these good dalesfolk, all with few exceptions forming his congregation. For the first time, indeed, I found my co-religionists in a majority, but the Vallée d'Aspe formed part of the ancient Béarn, and during centuries the Reformed faith has been stoutly upheld in these fastnesses. A tablet in the neat little church of Osse recalls how the original place of Protestant worship was levelled to the ground by royal edict in 1685, and only rebuilt in 1800-5. With a refinement of cruelty, it was the Protestants themselves who, on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, were compelled to demolish their beloved *temple*. Deprived of church, pastor, and Bibles, constrained to bury their dead in field or garden, the Aspois yet clung tenaciously to the faith of their fathers. One concession, and one only, they made. Peasant property from time immemorial has existed in the Pyrenees, and in order to legitimize their children and enjoy testamentary



privileges, the Protestants of the Vallée d'Aspe submitted to marriages according to Romish rites. Old family Bibles are very rarely to be found among the descendants of these ancient Huguenot families. The explanation is simple. No matter the precautions taken to hide such heirlooms and prime sources of consolation, sooner or later inkling was got of them by the *maréchaussée*, or royal police, and the sacred books were ruthlessly burnt.

Here I will mention that, although the Catholic and Protestant population live harmoniously side by side, intermarriages are rare, and the rival churches neither gain nor lose adherents to any appreciable extent. Between Protestant pastor and Catholic priest in any part of France there is no kind of intercourse whatever. They stand aloof from one another as French and Germans in the annexed provinces.

On Sunday mornings the little church would be full, the men dressed in black, cloth trousers, alpaca blouses, and neckties, set off by spotless shirt-fronts, the older women wearing the black hood and long black coat of the traditional Huguenot matron, the younger of the children dark stuff gowns and coloured kerchiefs tied under the chin. The service was of the simplest, my host's young daughter presiding at the harmonium, her mother leading the choir of school children, and all the congregation, as in English churches, joining in the hymns. The communion service was especially touching in its simplicity and the subdued fervour of the partakers. All stood in a semicircle before the table, the pastor, as he handed symbolic draught and bread to each, uttering some scriptural phrase appropriate to recipient and occasion.

One's thoughts went back to the ancestors of these sturdy mountaineers, their pastors condemned to death or the galleys, their assemblage for purposes of worship liable to similar punishments, their very Bibles burnt by the common hangman. Like the Pilgrim Fathers, the French



PROTESTANT CHURCH OF SANJON (SAINTONGE)



Huguenots have been tried in the fire, and rarely found wanting.

Sunday was observed as a day of unbroken repose. My host would, in the afternoon, take me for a round of calls; and highly instructive were these chats with peasant farmers, some possessing an acre or two only, and living in frugalest fashion, others owning well-stocked farms of twenty or thirty acres, and commodious well-furnished houses. In one, indeed, we found a piano, pictures, and a Japanese cabinet! The region is entirely pastoral, hardly a bourgeois element entering into this community of six hundred souls. The village street consists of farmhouses, and where shops are needed folks betake themselves to Bedous, on the other side of the *gave*. Shopping, however, is here reduced to the minimum. The women still spin linen from home-grown flax, wheat and maize are grown for household use, pigs and poultry reared for domestic consumption, and milk is the chief drink of old and young. Doubtless, although this point I did not inquire into, every matron had her provision of home-made simples, a family medicine chest, conferring independence of the pharmacy.

With no little regret my friend and myself turned our backs upon this mountain-hemmed parsonage. Life is short, and the French map is enormous. Having set myself the task of traversing France from end to end, I could not hope to revisit scenes so full of natural beauty and pleasurable association. A drive of sixteen miles to and from a railway station is a serious obstacle to those who do not appreciate the motor-car. I felt that the Vallée d'Aspe, alas! must remain a memory, a charming but closed chapter of French experiences.

It must not be inferred that every pastor's lot is cast in such pleasant places. From a pecuniary and social point of view, many pastorates may appear more desirable; but how delightful the peace of this Pyrenean retreat, how grateful the sense of reciprocated amity and esteem! To

some the isolation would prove irksome, especially during the winter season. The climate, however, is comparatively mild, and whilst the mountains are tipped with snow, the valley is very rarely so whitened.

In other French parsonages have I spent many weeks. One of these represented the humbler, a second the more cosmopolitan, type. Perhaps the stipend of the first incumbent reached two thousand francs, just £80 a year, in addition to good house and large garden. My hosts had two children, and at that time no private means. As, moreover, they lived in a remote country town, and were without English connections, boarders could not be counted upon. So the narrow resources were eked out with rigid economy. A servant was, of course, wholly out of the question. The pastor taught his boy and girl, and his wife, with occasional help from outside, did the housework. The daily fare was soup, followed by the meat and vegetables from which it had been made, a cutlet or some other extra being put before the visitor.

Madame, although neatness itself, never wore a gown except on Sundays, or when paying a visit, her usual costume being a well-worn but quite clean and tidy morning wrap. The solitary black silk dress had to be most carefully used, so little prospect seemed there of ever replacing it. By the strangest caprice of fortune, some years after my visit this lady's husband inherited a handsome fortune. Rare, indeed, are such windfalls in the French parsonage, perhaps rarer still the sequel of this story.

For when I lately asked of a common friend what had become of the pastor and his heritage, she replied—

"He stays where he was, and does nothing but good with his money."

My host of former days had neither quitted the little parsonage of that country town nor relinquished his calling.

There, amid old friends and associations, he will most



likely end his days. We see in his case the result of early bringing up, the influence of Huguenot ancestry.

In large cities possessing a numerous Protestant community the stipend is higher, and the parsonage is replaced by a commodious flat. The attractions of society and resources of a town enable pastors to receive young men of good family, English or otherwise, who appreciably contribute to the family budget. Belonging to this category is the third pastoral roof under which I spent a pleasant summer holiday, and concerning which there is not much to say. Existence under such conditions becomes cosmopolitan. However agreeable may be our sojourn, it has no distinctive features.

The Protestant pastor has not found favour with the French novelists. Few and far between are the stories in which the Protestant element is introduced at all. "Constance," by Th. Bentzon, is an exception; "L'un vers l'autre," an engaging story by a new writer, is another. The late Alphonse Daudet brutally travestied Protestantism in "L'Évangéliste;" and another writer of European reputation, M. Jules Lemaître, stooped so low as to turn the Reformed faith into buffoonery for the stage. For the most part French writers seem to share Louis Blanc's opinion—in France Protestantism has ceased to exist.

I add that the Reformed Church (Calvinistic) in 1893 numbered 883 pastors, as against 90 of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran), and that 800 French towns and communes possess Protestant churches, these figures being exclusive of English places of worship. The number of churches and schools is added to every year. All information on this subject is obtainable in the little "Protestant Agenda," an annual publication, price one shilling.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PROFESSOR OF AGRICULTURE

**S**ELF-DEPRECIATION is a French characteristic. Our neighbours never tire of stultifying themselves as a nation of functionaries, a social body made up of small placemen. Some writers, in this predilection for administrative routine, even discern a canker-worm preying upon national vitality. They hold that officialism is eating away the germs of enterprise and independence. The manhood of France, assert such critics, is thereby losing qualities more than ever needed if their country is to maintain her position among nations.

May not the bureaucratic system be justified by national character—be, in fact, a natural evolution of temperament and aptitudes? Just as an insular people is impelled to hazard and adventure, may not a continental nation be predisposed to repose and stability?

For my own part, I have long regarded the small French official from an admiring and sympathetic point of view. Bureaucracy seems to me a factor in the body politic no less admirable than that of peasant proprietorship itself. At the present time, too, how refreshing is the contemplation of these dignified, unpretentious, laborious lives! Elsewhere we find frenzied speculation, inordinate craving after wealth, and lavish expenditure. Untouched by such sinister influences, the French civil servant “keeps the noiseless tenor of his way,” a modest competence crowning his honourable and most useful career.

To no class have I been more indebted in the course of my usual surveys than to the departmental professor of agriculture. *Locus est et pluribus umbris*, "plenty of room for uninvited guests," wrote the Roman poet to his friend; and the Third Republic, when creating these State professorships, was evidently of Horace's opinion. Multifarious as were already Government bureaux, a few more might advantageously be added. Paradoxical as it may sound, the departmental professor was nominated in order to teach the peasant farming! But if, as Arthur Young wrote a hundred and odd years ago, you give a man secure possession of a black rock and he will turn it into a garden, peasant ownership is not always progressive. The departmental professor must coax small farmers out of their groove—in fine, teach them that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in their philosophy. Recruited from the State agricultural schools of Rennes, Grignau, Montpellier, and others, these gentlemen have gone through a complete practical and scientific training, and exercise a real influence in rural districts. Their gratuitous classes in winter evenings, no matter how apparently mystifying may be the subject treated, are always well attended by young and old. But it is the Sunday afternoon *conférence*, or lecture held out-of-doors, that proves most attractive and illuminating to the hard-headed peasant. These lectures take the form of an object-lesson. New machinery and chemical manures, seeds, plants, and roots are exhibited, inquiries being invited and explanations given.

Very characteristic is the behaviour of the middle-aged, often white-haired pupils gathered around the demonstrator's table. Most deliberative, most leisurely of national temperaments, the French mind works slowly.

"It will often happen," says my friend Monsieur R——, departmental professor in Western France, "that a peasant farmer will return again and again to a piece of

machinery or sample of chemical manure before making up his mind to buy either. Like a bird suspecting a gin, he hovers round the tempting bait at a distance, at last venturing upon nearer inspection and a few inquiries, perhaps weeks later deciding upon the perilous leap ; in other words, to throw aside his antiquated drilling machine for Ransome's latest improvement, or to lay out a few francs upon approved seeds or roots." No more cautious, I should perhaps say suspicious, being inhabits the globe than Jacques Bonhomme. Not only does farming proper, that is to say, the cultivation of the soil and the breeding of stock, fall within the professor's province, but kindred subjects, the name of which in France is legion. Especially must his attention be given to the oftentimes multifarious products and industries of his own province, such as mule-rearing, cyder and liqueur making, the culture of medicinal herbs, silkworm breeding, vine-dressing, and the fabrication of wine. In matters agricultural he must indeed be encyclopædic, resembling Fadladeen, the great Vizier, "who was a judge of everything, from the pencilling of a Circassian's eyelids to the deepest questions of science and literature, from a conserve of rose-leaves to an epic poem."

Like the immortal Mr. Turveydrop, also, he must perpetually show himself. And if not in the flesh, at least vicariously, he must survey mankind from China to Peru. Not only is his presence indispensable at local and municipal meetings of agricultural societies, at agricultural shows and congresses, at sittings of the Departmental Council General, at markets and fairs, but beyond the frontier, across the channel and the Gulf of Lyons, he wends his way. Now he visits the Shire horse show at Islington, now an agricultural congress in Rome, or an *exposition vinicole* (exhibition of wines) in Algeria.

Again, the amount of writing that has to be got through by the departmental professor is enormous. Reports for

the Minister of Agriculture are periodically drawn up, pamphlets and flying sheets for general distribution are expected of him, besides contributions to the local journals of agriculture. Whenever I receive a printed communication from my friend M. R——, I am moved to confraternal commiseration, my own aching fingers ache doubly out of sympathy.

The devastation wrought by the phyloxera, as we all know, cost France a sum equal to that of the Franco-Prussian war indemnity, namely, two hundred million sterling. In the midst of that panic-stricken period a prize of a million francs (£40,000) was offered by the Government for the discovery of a remedy. No one obtained this splendid gratuity, but several professors of agriculture, amongst others M. R——, have serviceably co-operated in the reconstitution of vineyards by American stocks, and other works of amelioration.

The Third Republic has ennobled agriculture as well as accorded it a professorial chair. As behoved a *régime* whose watchword is peace, the French Government some years since instituted a second Legion of Honour. Warriors wear the red ribbon, academic dignities confer the purple; the yellow rosette now chiefly encountered at agricultural shows and markets denotes the newly created *ordre du mérite agricole*, or order of agricultural merit. Not only do we see this badge on the frock-coat of the professor, but occasionally it adorns the peasant's blue blouse. And if the former is gratified by such recognition of his services, how much more must the humble farmer or dairyman glory in his tiny orange rosette! For a bit of coloured ribbon may seem a small thing, but its symbolism may be immense. By what laborious hours and painful effort has not the husbandman's insignia been gained!

To appraise French character we should see our neighbours, not only in their own homes, but amid English



surroundings. A former cicerone in Normandy, M. R—— twice afforded me the opportunity of returning the compliment on native soil. What struck me about my friend was the change that comes over a Frenchman as soon as he quits his own country, an attitude the exact reverse of an Englishman's mental condition abroad. In France a Frenchman's mood is invariably critical, that of a carper. Away from home he looks about for something to appreciate and admire. With ourselves, too often a fleeting glance or supercilious expression seem to be thought appropriate to everything foreign.

And wherever he is a Frenchman's eyes are open. I well remember one instance of this when strolling with M. R—— on the parade at Hastings. It was in February, for my friend had crossed the channel in order to visit the horse show at Islington. As we now walked briskly along, I saw him look at the line of fly-horses, each well protected from the cold by a stout horse-cloth.

"How admirably your cab-horses are cared for here!" he observed; adding, "I shall make a note of this for one of my lectures."

And as the French peasant's want of consideration for his animals often arises from thoughtlessness, who knows M. R—— may prove a benefactor to cart-horses as well as those of the hackney carriage? In the year of Queen Victoria's final jubilee, I had the pleasure of accompanying my friend to Rothamstead, spending a delightfully instructive day with the late Sir John Lawes and his charming granddaughters; also of introducing him to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington. We had projected a visit to the agricultural school of Hollesley Bay, Suffolk, but the departmental professor of agriculture is the *commis voyageur*, the commercial traveller of the State, not always a very indulgent firm. M. R——'s report was called for, and to our mutually-shared regret the expedition had to be given up.

When I first knew my friend, he had just exchanged the modest post of *répétiteur*, or junior master in a State agricultural school, for that of departmental professor. I do not suppose any man living is more contented with his present lot—a proud and happy *père de famille*, a wife of equally happy temperament, and two little sons making up his home circle, the combined incomes of husband and wife sufficing for daily needs, the education of their children, and the usual putting by. Truly to these civil servants of France may be applied the Roman poet's apostrophe, it is such men—

“Who make the golden mean their guide,  
 Shun miser's cabin foul and dark,  
 Shun gilded roofs, where pomp and pride  
 Are envy's mark.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE JUGE DE PAIX

IT is now twenty-five years since I made the acquaintance of M. D——, *juge de paix* of a canton in the Jura. We came to know each other in this way. I had hired a carriage for the three hours' drive from the superbly situated little town of Morez on the Bienne to the still more superbly situated little bishopric of St. Claude. As I never travel alone when agreeable company is to be had, I asked my friends to find me travelling companions, which they did. The elderly gentleman and his wife, bound like myself to St. Claude, immediately on arrival introduced me to their newly married daughter and her husband, lately named *juge de paix* of the district. With characteristic French amiability, Monsieur and Madame D—— set themselves the task not only of showing me the ancient little city and its surroundings, but its curious and time-honoured industries, the turnery and wood-carving done at home, each craftsman working under his own roof.

The pleasant and profitable intercourse of those few days ripened into friendship. A few years later I visited my friends in another romantic corner of the same department, Monsieur D—— having been nominated to a less remote canton.

The *juge de paix*, it is hardly necessary to say, is a creation of the Revolution. In his person is represented one of the most sweeping reforms ever effected by pen and

ink. The administration of justice was summarily transferred from a privileged and venal class to responsible servants of the State.

And here a word as to the title. This modestly paid interpreter of the law was thus named because his mission in a great measure was to conciliate, to prevent lawsuits by advice and impartial intervention. This cheap, simple, and paternal jurisdiction was instituted in the special interests of the peasant and the workman, formerly often ruined by the multiplicity of tribunals and rapacity of notaries and lawyers.

It must be remembered that from time immemorial the rural population in France has been a propertied class, hence the perpetual recurrence to litigation. Under the *ancien régime*, as to-day, Jacques Bonhomme and his neighbours would be at daggers drawn about limitations of newly acquired field, damages done by stray cattle, or some such matter. And the cheapness of going to law in these days may perhaps have fostered a litigious propensity. Certainly these rural magistrates have plenty to do. The *juge de paix* is appointed by the State, he receives a yearly stipend of three or four thousand francs, with a small retiring pension at sixty. As he must be thoroughly versed in the Code Civil, his services do not appear to be adequately remunerated, especially when we compare his office and its emoluments to those of the *percepteur*, or tax collector, the subject of my next sketch. On this point a French friend writes to me: "*Percepteurs*, even of the first and second grades (*i.e.* lower), are certainly better paid than the *juge de paix*. But the former is only a fiscal agent, whilst the latter is a magistrate charged with very varied and delicate duties. He must have a thorough knowledge of law; the *percepteur*, on the contrary, need only be a man of ordinary education, for this reason I do not hesitate to place him below the other, although his services are much better remunerated."

The responsibilities of the *juge de paix* are strictly limited. He can sentence to short terms of imprisonment and to fines not exceeding two hundred francs, the next stage in administration being that of the *Tribunal correctionnel de l'arrondissement*. The *arrondissement* is that division of a department presided over by a *sous-préfet*. In cases of burglary, accident, murder, suicide, arson, the *juge de paix* is immediately sent for. It is his business to seal the papers of defunct persons, and to represent the law at those *conseils de famille*, or family councils, I describe elsewhere.

The especial function of the *justice de paix* regarded as a system is intermediary and preventive rather than judiciary. Disputes are always settled by friendly arbitration when possible. Country folks, as I have said, have a marked proclivity for the *procès verbal*, in other words, going to law. Were, indeed, a rural judge paid according to his cases, he would die a millionaire.

As we might expect, small unenclosed properties are a fruitful source of discord ; as we should certainly not expect among so easy-going a people, that unruly member the tongue is another. *Diffamation*, or the calling each other names, is constantly bringing neighbours into court, some of the scenes enacted being ludicrous in the extreme.

Indeed, my friend assured me that the maintenance of gravity was often the most arduous and trying part of his sittings. But, he added, echoing the sentiment of the immortal Bagnet, "discipline must be maintained."

The minimum fine for a case of backbiting and slander is two francs, a large sum in Jacques Bonhomme's eyes. The mulct, however, does not prevent his womankind from calling each other "base and degrading Tildas" at the next opportunity.

With my friend's young wife I attended a *séance*, or sitting, of the *justice de paix*, an experience not to be omitted by those who would study the French peasant.







A SITTING OF THE JUGE DE PAIX

In the centre of the plain, airy court sat the judge, wearing his robes of office, high-crowned hat with silver band, advocate's black gown and white lappets. On his right sits his *greffier*, or clerk, also wearing judicial hat and gown ; on his left, his *suppléant*, or coadjutor, representing the public prosecutor. This last is an unpaid official. By the judge lies a copy of the Code Civil. This volume is not used in swearing witnesses, the only formula exacted being the words, "*Par Dieu, les hommes, et la vérité*" ("by God, man, and the truth"). Above the chair of office was suspended crucifix. On the occasion of my visit several typical cases came before the judge. One of these concerned boundary marks. The disputants were both peasants—the first, a grave, taciturn middle-aged man ; the other, a voluble young fellow, whose eloquence on his own behalf M. D—— had great difficulty in repressing. The affair was promptly disposed of. On that day fortnight, at eight o'clock in the morning, the litigants were bidden to appear on the contested borderland, when the rival claims would be adjusted by the judge in person.

I also heard an old farmer in blue blouse plead his own cause with the shrewdness and pertinence of a counsel. The bone of contention was a contract, the other party, according to his showing, not having fulfilled his obligations. Property handed down from father to son proves an education in many senses, not only sharpening the wits, but rendering glib the tongue.

It was interesting to note that no matter how noisy or self-asserting might be the litigants, the majesty of the law was ever readily acknowledged. The simple "You can retire" of the magistrate sufficed. Very rarely, I was informed, is it necessary to appeal to a gendarme.

A *juge de paix* is sometimes confronted with problems only to be solved after the rough-and-ready methods of King Solomon or the equally subtle lawgiver of Barataria. From the strictest impartiality he must never

deviate, hence the almost affectionate respect hemming him round. One perpetual surprise in France is the prevailing intellectuality, the general atmosphere of culture. These small officials—M. D—— is one of several rural magistrates I have known—are not only skilled in law and jurisprudence, but often possess considerable literary and artistic tastes. Cut off from the stimulus of great centres, travel, and congenial society, they do not allow themselves to vegetate, maintaining on the contrary an alert interest in matters lying wholly outside their own immediate venue.

All fairly well educated Frenchmen have a good knowledge of the national literature, due to early training. The love of the beautiful, so universally found throughout France, may, I think, be traced to the local museum. Hardly any town of a few thousand souls is without its art collection, and the influence of such object-lessons within easy reach is incalculable.

One *juge de paix* I know had visited England, and amongst other experiences had seen Irving in some of his most famous rôles. This gentleman could have passed, I dare say, an examination in Walter Scott and Dickens, darling topics on which, alas! he could only discourse during the long vacation. From August to September he had a cover laid for him at the chateau whenever English guests were staying there, which was pretty often, the owners being good friends of England.

Another rural magistrate of my acquaintance has long been a warm advocate of arbitration and of the *entente cordiale*. Two years ago he joined a local branch of the French Arbitration Society.

"The bicycle, the bicycle!" he said to me. "Ah! there we have an admirable engine of propaganda. Miles and miles are members of the arbitration societies thereby enabled to cover, reaching out-of-the-way spots, and getting at the peasants as it is impossible to do by means of

lectures and public meetings. A friendly chat over a glass of wine, a talk in the fields, that is the best means of obtaining the countryman's confidence."

The speaker in question had private means, and with his young wife took holiday trips in the long vacation ; the pair kept a servant, and enjoyed comparative luxury. Of the many *juges de paix* I have known only one or two lived on such a scale. And the fact must never be lost sight of, prestige in France does not depend upon material circumstances.

Absence of pretence characterizes official life. A rural magistrate is not looked down upon because his wife happens to be her own cook, housemaid, and nurse. No word in the French lexicon precisely answers to our own "gentility" or its unspoken meaning. We do not in these days speak of living genteelly, but of doing as other people do, which amounts to the same thing.

The French phrase *comme il faut* indicates something wholly different. To dress, behave, keep house *comme il faut* has reference only to the befitting, the adhesion to strict propriety. Appearance is not bent knee to, and if thrift is apt to degenerate into parsimony, and much that we regard as absolutely essential to comfort and well-being is sacrificed to the habit, we must yet whole heartedly admire the simple, unambitious, dignified life of the small French official.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE TAX COLLECTOR

**I**N a certain sense an Englishman's home is a caravanserai, whilst a Frenchman's is a closely fortified castle, tradition here being completely at fault.

This reflection has often crossed my mind when spending week after week in French country houses. Under an English roof the visitor would be one of an uninterrupted succession, not only every spare bedchamber being occupied during the holiday season, but daily luncheons, garden parties, picnics, and other social entertainments making time and money fly!

Partly because our neighbours object to unnecessary outlay, partly because they object still more to anything in the way of household disorganization or interference with routine, an average country house over the water is a veritable fortress, drawbridge and portcullis only yielding to the "open sesame" of blood relationship.

By virtue of propinquity, however, two or three individuals are permitted within the charmed circle; the first is the village priest, the second is the *juge de paix*, the third is the *percepteur*, or collector of revenue, or, as we should say, the tax gatherer.

Before sketching my old acquaintance, M. le Percepteur R—, let me say a few words about his office.

The collector of revenue thus called was created by Napoleon when first consul. Fiscal resources had not been

successfully administered during the successive *régimes* of the two assemblies, the Convention and the Directoire. So thoroughly had the legislators of the Revolution reformed abuses that, as Mignet tells us, the national resources quadrupled within a few years. But what with European and civil wars, internal administration suffered neglect. In many regions taxes had remained in arrears for considerable periods. The municipal authorities superseding the hated *Intendants* of the *ancien régime*, charged also with the levying of troops, were unable satisfactorily to carry out both duties. Herein, in a great measure, writes M. Rambaud ("Civilization Française"), is to be discerned the genesis of the Terror. The law as it stood could not legally punish negligent or hostile functionaries. The *représentants en mission*, or legislative emissaries, named by the Convention in order to remedy such a state of things, were veritable dictators, sending recalcitrants to the guillotine with short shrift. That charming story-teller Charles Nodier, in his "Souvenirs de la Revolution," describes from personal recollection an emissary of this kind, the terrible St. Just.

Napoleon's scheme was somewhat modified, and the existing arrangement is as follows: to each canton or group of communes a *percepteur* is named by the Minister of Finance, the nominee being obliged to produce a certain sum of money as guarantee. The *Percepteur* collects what are called *contributions directes*, the assessing of such taxes being in the hands of *contrôleurs*, or inspectors, by whom assessments are lodged with the local mayors, the mayors in their turn passing them on to the *percepteurs* each January. All moneys are paid to the *Receveur*, or paymaster of the *arrondissement*, an administrative division; the *Receveur* again hands on the amount to the *Tresorier*, or treasurer of the department. Finally, the year's revenue finds its way into the State coffers. *Contributions directes*, i.e. direct taxation, comprise land tax and house duty,

taxes on property and on *patentes*, or licences. *Contributions indirectes*, i.e. indirect taxation, comprise stamp duties, excise, duties on tobacco, matches, traffic, etc. Octroi, or duties on produce, are levied by municipalities.

The poor-law is non-existent in France. Ratepayers are not mulcted a sou for the maintenance of the sick and aged poor, or the indigent generally.

The first-named charges, or *contributions directes*, fall upon all rents above £20 in Paris and £8 in the provinces. Windows are still taxed, but in 1831 the rate was lowered in order that workmen at home and in factories should not suffer from want of light and air.

The relative proportion of State and municipal taxation is gathered from the following figures supplied by a friend. Of 119 francs paid in all, 64 and a fraction go to the budget, and 54 and a fraction to the town. Up till the year 1877 a much-hated official called *garnissaire*, or bailiff, could instal himself in the house of a defaulting taxpayer and there claim bed and board till all arrears were forthcoming. With the general increase of well-being and instruction, the function became a sinecure. Nowadays taxes are rapidly and easily collected from one end of France to the other.

As the *Percepteur's* emoluments depend upon his venue, the post is often extremely lucrative, in large centres representing a thousand a year. The tax gatherer of a canton, on the other hand, will perhaps receive no more than £80 annually. It certainly seems somewhat inconsistent that the dispensation of justice should be less remunerated than the collection of revenue, the *juge de paix*, as I have before shown, never enjoying but the most modest stipend.

Farm-houses and rural dwellings often lie wide apart. The *Percepteur's* domicile cannot lie within easy reach of all his creditors; like Mahomet, he will be obliged to go to the mountain. In other words, the tax gatherer, as was

the case with his hated predecessor of the *ancien régime*, from time to time makes a round, and is apparently ever welcome as the flowers in May.

I always knew when M. le Percepteur R—— was expected by Burgundian friends with whom I formerly used to spend autumn holidays. Bustle is never a word suited to French methods. Among our sensible neighbours it is never a question of "The devil catch the hindmost." Folks daily rest on their oars. But if "a man of wealth is dubbed a man of worth," may not be a dictum universally accepted, the handling of national money-bags ever imparts unusual dignity. The worthy *Percepteur* was *fêted* as if, like Sully, he was followed by wheelbarrows piled high with gold.

All day long my hostess and her old cook would be up to their ears in business. Forest, field, and stream were laid under contribution in his honour. Oysters and other delicacies were ordered from the neighbouring town. Choicest wines and liqueurs were brought from the cellar. And, of course, the incomparable, ineffable dish before mentioned—

"Beast of chase or fowl or game  
In pasty built,"

crowned the feast.

Portly, jovial, middle-aged, and a bachelor, M. le Percepteur was excellent company. In French phrase, he bore the cost of conversation. Fiscalities and rural affairs formed the staple of talk, subjects of never-waning interest to the wine-growers and notaries present, and not without instruction for outsiders.

Montaigne, who ever wrote like a nonagenarian, somewhere dwells in his delightfully jog-trot, ambling way on the profit to be gained from men no matter their calling, if you listen to them on that calling. And if during the past twenty-five years I have attained some knowledge of

French life and character, it is not from books at all, but from following Montaigne's rule, from listening to Frenchmen and Frenchwomen on their own avocations.

M. le Percepteur, after the manner of bachelors, coddled himself a bit, and before his departure begged a favour of me. He was in the habit of taking tea for the furtherance of digestion, and good tea in country places was unattainable. Would I be so amiable as to procure him some really first-rate Souchong?

Of course I was only too delighted to fulfil the commission, a poor return for indebtedness of other kind.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE YOUNG BUSINESS LADY

“A PERFECT woman nobly planned” for practical life, the young business lady offers a study complex as that of the fastidiously-reared demoiselle belonging to fashionable society, whose dowry of itself ensures her a brilliant marriage.

The exact counterpart of the French young lady of business, I should say, is nowhere to be found, certainly not in England. Aptitudes, ideals, physical and mental equation are essentially and ancestrally Gallic and conservative. The wave of *féminisme*, or the woman's rights' movement, has not reached the sphere in which she moves ; if not a radiant figure, she is, at all times, a dignified and edifying one, by her Milton's precept having been early taken to heart—

“To know  
That which before us lies in daily life  
Is the prime wisdom.”

It may here be mentioned that, no matter her rank, a French girl is regarded as an old maid at the age of twenty-five. If neither married nor betrothed by the time she reaches that venerable period, by general consent, single blessedness awaits her. The spinster of fashion and society has two avenues from which to choose—conventual seclusion or devotion to good works outside its walls. The business young lady pursues her avocations without mortification or repining at unpropitious fate.

In leisured and wealthy classes the thought of approaching spinsterhood is a veritable nightmare. The hiding of mortified vanity or misplaced sentiment in a convent, or the assumption of a pietistic *rôle* amid old surroundings, involve bitter disillusion. What an end to the dazzling dreams and airy hopes of a few years before! What a contrast to existence as pictured by the youthful communicant in anticipatory bridal dress! The Rubicon of twenty-five passed, a lady clerk or manageress contemplates the future undismayed.

Old maids of twenty-five, whether portioned or no, may, of course, occasionally marry, especially in the work-a-day world; and here it is curious to note the rigidity of etiquette obligatory on both.

I have mentioned elsewhere that brides and bridegrooms elect, moving in good society, are invariably chaperoned. Alike indoors and out, a third person, not necessarily listening or looking on, must keep them company. But seeing that girls, who earn their own living, attain habits of independence at an early age, we should expect to find such rules relaxed in their case. No such thing! The young lady forewoman or bookkeeper, whether under or over twenty-five, cannot go to the theatre with her *fiancé* unaccompanied by a relation; still less can she take train with him, in order to visit friends ten miles off, whilst *tête-à-tête* strolls or visits to public places of entertainment are wholly out of the question. Even a well-conducted *femme de chambre* is here as scrupulous as her eighteen-year-old mistress.

The reputation of the young business lady, like that of Cæsar's wife, must be beyond reproach. Dress, speech, deportment, must defy criticism. Advancement, increase of pay, her very bread, depend upon circumspection, a standard of conduct never deviated from in the least little particular.

Flirtation is no more permissible in the business world than in good society. The thing not existing in France, no equivalent for the word can be found in French dictionaries. A girl may have the maternal eye upon her or find herself thrown upon the world. Etiquette and bringing up forbid flirtation. Moreover, in young Frenchwomen of all ranks, outside Bohemia, is found what, for want of a precise term, I will call instinctive decorum (*l'instinct de bienséance*), and sentimentality is not a French failing. No young business lady sighs for the kind of distraction so necessary to her English and American sisters. If marriage comes in her way, before arriving at a decision, she will carefully go over the *pros* and *cons*, wisely taking material as well as social matters into consideration. If the spinsterhood traditionally entered upon at twenty-five takes the shape of destiny, with even mind she will pursue her calling, to that devoting undivided energies, endeavouring every year to make herself more valuable to employers. Attracted as a needle by the magnet, step by step she will approach the goal of French workers, a small independence, the dignity of living upon one's means, of being able to inscribe one's self in the census *rentier* or *rentière*.

The pre-eminence of the French business woman I set down, firstly, to consummate ability ; secondly, to dogged, unremitting absorption in her duties. There is here no waste of mental force, no frittering away of talents. Capacities and acquirements are focussed to a single point.

One of my acquaintances in the French work-a-day world is a girl of twenty-six, already at the head of a large establishment in Paris, having two clerks of the other sex, and older than herself, at her orders, and enjoying confidence so complete that her books are never so much as glanced at by the proprietors.

This young lady once observed to me—

"I possess what, of course, is necessary to one in my position—an excellent memory. Nobody is infallible, but I may say this much for myself, I rarely, if ever, forget anything. And the way to cultivate memory is to trust to it. 'Never write down what you are bound to remember,' I say to my young clerks when I see them bring out a note-book."

I have somewhere read that Thomas Brassey, the great railway contractor, was of the same opinion, using his memory only as tablets.

Business hours over, the desk closed, office doors shut upon her, fast as omnibus, tramway, or metropolitan can carry her, the young business lady hurries home. The home, the family circle, added to these, perhaps, some friend of school days, exercise magnetic attraction. If the weather admits, not a moment will be spent indoors; shopping and visits, in company of mother, sister, or friend, during the winter; lounges in the public gardens, drives in the Bois, or excursions by penny steamer during the summer, make leisure moments fly. On half-holidays Chantilly, St. Germain-en-Laye, Meudon, even Fontainebleau are visited, whilst all the year round the drama forms a staple recreation. These young business women are often uncommonly good dramatic critics. If by virtue of twenty-five years, assumed spinsterhood, and position, they can patronize theatres inaccessible to girls of a different rank, they can fully appreciate the opera and the Français. It was in the company of a lady clerk that I witnessed *La Course au Flambeau*, at the Renaissance, a piece from beginning to end serious as a sermon, its vital interest depending, not upon lovers' intrigues, but upon humdrum fireside realities, the tragedy of everyday family life. No more intelligent or appreciative companion at a play could be wished for than my young friend. Here, I would observe, that just as the interest of French travel is doubled by the fact of French

companionship, so should theatre-going be enjoyed in French society.

Novel-reading is not much indulged in by these busy girls. The French notion of enjoyment and relaxation is to be abroad, sunshine and fresh air, taken with beloved home-folk. Beyond such quiet pleasures and occasional excitements of wedding celebrations, always long drawn out in bourgeois circles, a visit to the opera, and in summer a brief holiday by the sea, life flows evenly. We are accustomed to regard the French as a volatile, pleasure-seeking, even frivolous, race. Nothing can be farther from the truth. In very truth our neighbours are the most persistently serious folk on the face of the earth.

If French employers are exacting, they are at the same time generous. A capable and trustworthy manageress, head clerk, or superintendent is sure to be handsomely remembered on New Year's Day, to have her salary raised from time to time, and growing confidence will be testified in many ways.

The subject of Frenchwomen's position in the industrial world would fill a volume. Skilfully treated, the dry bones of statistics may be made to live ; but such a work is quite beyond my own powers, and would have little interest for the general reader. I leave figures and generalizations to others, contenting myself with describing business women I have known, and adding a few details as to salary, leisure, and accommodation. Naturally the non-resident clerk, giving a certain number of hours daily, is in a very different position to the *directrice*, or the manageress, who lives on the premises and can call no time her own, except precisely limited periods, sure to be spent by her at home. Board, lodging, and laundress being very expensive in Paris, quite a third higher than in any English town, the *directrice* is well rewarded for the sacrifice of time, the domestic fireside, and independence. I know at the present



time a young lady employed in a public office whose salary is £8 a month for seven hours' daily attendance, with occasional Sunday duty. As she lives with her parents, such a sum enables her to contribute to the family budget, and at the same time lay by a little for old age or a dowry! Many young business women achieve a modest portion with which to enter upon the partnership of wedlock. The resident manageress, on the other hand, not only economizes the triple outlay of above mentioned, but obtains at least a higher salary. She is, however, expected to dress well, and dress in France, like everything else, from a postage stamp upwards, is much dearer than in England. The toilette of a business young lady makes a large hole in her earnings. Again, likely as not, she has family claims upon her, perhaps the partial support of a widowed mother, maybe the education of a young sister or brother. In spite of these and other drains upon her purse, you may be sure that she makes yearly or half-yearly investments. The young business woman, no less than the peasant, rendered M. Thiers' colossal task feasible. It was the indomitable thrift of the work-a-day world that enabled him to pay off the Prussian war indemnity of two hundred million sterling before the allotted term.

The French nation is not like our own, an egregiously holiday-making one. Sunday closing, or partial closing, is on the increase both in town and country, but statutory holidays are unknown.

A fortnight or three weeks during the year, an afternoon every other Sunday, two hours or so every alternate day—with such breaks in the round of duty, a young business lady feels no call for dissatisfaction. And although serenely contemplating spinsterhood at twenty-five, marriage, with its mutually-shared cares and benisons, may come in her way; if not, advancing years, loneliness, and other drawbacks of a celibate existence will be cheered and dignified by an honestly earned independence, the

affectionately-hungered for position of *rentière*, or a lady living upon her dividends.

I have mentioned a young business lady's keen appreciation of high dramatic art. But taste is so generally cultivated in France that the trait is by no means exceptional. It may, indeed, be said that up to a certain point every French man or woman is an artist.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A GREAT LADY MERCHANT

**M**Y friend Madame Veuve M—— belongs to what is called in France “le haut commerce.” In other words, she is a merchant, head of a wholesale house, as important as any of its kind in Paris.

In the provinces lady merchants often have their dwellings close to the business premises. At Croix, near Lille, for instance, I once visited the mistress of a large linen manufactory, living in princely style within sound of mill-wheel and workmen's bell. Her vast brand-new mansion stood in charmingly laid-out grounds. As I made my way to the chief entrance I caught sight of the coach-house containing landau, brake, and brougham. On arriving, myself and friend were ushered by a major domo in superb livery through a suite of reception rooms all fitted up in the most luxurious style and adorned with palms and exotics. In the last salon we were received by a fashionably dressed lady, whose small white hands glittered with diamond rings. But my friend's warehouse which I have just visited is situated in the heart of commercial Paris, amidst that congeries of offices and wholesale houses around the Bourse, in some degree answering to our own city. Here of course an agreeable residential flat is out of the question, so every afternoon she journeys to her pretty country house, a quarter of an hour from the capital by rail. There she turns her back upon the work-a-day world, finding oblivion in flowers, pets, and the exercise of

hospitality. Were it not, indeed, for these daily breaks in her arduous routine, she would never be able to support the perpetual mental strain entailed upon her. For this great business woman is not only the sole manager of a large concern, exporting her wares to all parts of the world, she is also an inventor, and her task of inventing is continuous ; no sooner is one creation off her hands than she must set to work upon another. From the 1st of January until the 31st of December, a brief interval excepted, the distracting process goes on ; the very thought makes one's brain whirl.

Madame M——, then, is the head of a large *lingerie*, or fine-linen warehouse, one of those establishments from which issue trousseaux and the latest fashions in slips and morning gowns. For times have changed since the days of Mrs. Glegg and Mrs. Tulliver. We all remember how those worthy ladies had their under-linen always made of the same pattern. Nowadays dainty fabrications in silk, lawn, and lace must have as much novelty about them as dresses and bonnets, and when I add that my friend is her own exclusive designer, enough will have been said to indicate alike her responsibilities and her gifts.

The demand for originality in *lingerie* is insatiable. Alike the cheapest and costliest model of one month must essentially differ from that of the last, and of course all madame's productions are models. Dispatched to the provinces, London, Cairo, the Transvaal, Ceylon, these patterns are copied by the hundred thousand.

Think of such a task, the obligation of daily inventing a new petticoat or morning wrap ! A novelist's duty of devising new incidents and unhackneyed imbroglios is surely light by comparison. No elegantly dressed lady like her country-woman just named is Madame M—— ; whilst her customers, lady shopkeepers, from the country drive up in the latest and richest toilettes, the mistress of this great establishment is as plainly and unpretendingly

dressed as a woman-farmer or country innkeeper. You soon find out, however, that you are conversing with a person of very uncommon endowments—endowments that would be very uncommon out of France. For there is no gainsaying the fact—the French business woman forms a type apart, and the Parisian *ouvrière* no less so.

Madame M——'s burdens are lightened by the competence of her superintendent fitters and workmen. On this subject she was eloquent.

"The Parisian *ouvrière*," she said to me, "stands absolutely alone. In quickness, taste, and general ability she has no equal. The hand-sewn garments you admire so much are got through with amazing expeditiousness."

Three hundred needlewomen are employed, who do the work, which is cut out for them, in their own homes, and earn from £1 a week upwards. One of these brought home a bundle of *peignoirs* during my visit—an alert-looking, bright-eyed girl, bareheaded after Parisian fashion, and evidently fully alive to the value of time. Depositing her pile, with a mere "*Bon jour*" to mistress and subordinates, away she went quickly as she had come. In the warehouse four demoiselles are employed, a superintendent, a cutter-out, a fitter, and a baster, *i.e.* one whose business it is to tack the respective parts of a model together. Highly instructive it was to watch the four severally occupied. A new morning gown was being tried on a dummy, the fitter and the baster putting their heads together and adding a dozen little improving touches. The forewoman was attending to a buyer, and seemed to know without being told exactly the kind of article she wanted. What struck me about all four was the evident pleasure taken by each in the exercise of their intelligence and the interest shown in their work. Evidently they considered themselves, not mere wage-earners, but working partners in a great concern, the credit of the mistress's house being their affair as much as her own. Doubtless



all four would in time themselves become business women, owners or managers of shops or warehouses.

A great concern indeed is such a *lingerie*. So tremendous is the demand for new patterns that I was assured it is impossible to keep up the supply.

"Everything you see here is sold," said my hostess to me, glancing at the closely packed shelves around her with almost a sigh. From floor to ceiling the place was packed with gossamer-like garments, not a vacant spot to be seen anywhere. The warehouse reminded me of a military store I had once seen in France, a vast emporium of soldiers' clothes kept in reserve, boots, képis, pantaloons, and great-coats by the hundred thousand. Whilst these were all of a pattern, make and material not differing in the slightest particular, quite otherwise is it with Madame M——'s elaborate productions. Here some difference either of shape or trimming stamped every article, from the hand-made *peignoir* trimmed with Valenciennes lace destined for rich trousseaux to the cheap but pretty slip within reach of the neat little *ouvrière*. Such divergence is a *sine quâ non*, a kind of hall-mark. And in the hands of a Frenchwoman how often will the merest touch bring this result about? An extra inch or two of lace, a clip of the scissors here, a stitch or two there, and the garment of yesterday has become a novelty!

Just as dolls are made in Germany, and return thither after being dressed in France, so Manchester nainsook and Nottingham lace are sent to Paris, returning to England in the shape of exquisite garments. Only Calais competes with Nottingham in the production of cheap pretty lace, and as the fashion in *lingerie* is now as capricious as that of millinery and dressmaking, Valenciennes and Maltese are generally superseded by the machine-made imitation. The consumption of Nottingham lace is enormous.

The conclusion must not be jumped at that the necessity of daily inventing a new morning wrap or skirt, and

closest attention to a large wholesale business, implies narrowness or want of sympathy. And here I would mention that even Balzac and Zola have occasionally rendered justice to the French business woman and *bourgeoise* generally. What a charming portrait is that of Constance Birotteau, and how exquisitely has Zola outlined the village bakeress in "Travail"! A novelist of less rank, but of almost equal popularity, has made a mistress-baker heroine of a story. But Ohnet's portraiture in "Serge Panine" is spoiled by its melodramatic climax. It is a thousand pities that so few French novelists are realistic in the proper sense of the word, and that they so seldom represent life and character as they are in reality.

How beautiful is friendship, for instance, and what a large part does friendship play in French lives! Madame M—— delights in the exercise of unaffected hospitality, and at parting bade me remember that in her cottage *ornée* there was ever a bedroom at my service. So in September of the present year (1904) I accepted the genial invitation.

My friend's *cottage ornée*, or villa, lies within a quarter of an hour of Paris on the western railway, and was built by herself—is indeed as much her own creation as the elegancies in lace and muslin turned out under her direction day after day. Her example was evidently being followed by others in search of quiet and rusticity. On either side of the road builders were busy, substantial dwellings in stone rising amid garden-ground to be, newly acquired plots as yet mere waste. And small wonder that commercial Paris thus bit by bit appropriates the verdant zone outside Thiers' fortifications, gradually becoming a kind of semi-suburban gentry, a landowning class having distinctive features.

The village selected by Madame M—— for her country retreat is not picturesque, but happy in its surroundings, gentle slopes and woodland forming a plain entirely given

up to market gardening. Not wholly unpoetic and certainly grateful to the eye is the vast chess-board, patches of sea-green alternating with purple; the rich yellow of the melon and reddish ochre of the gourd conspicuous as Chinese lanterns amid twilight foliage.

With natural pride madame opened the gate of a handsome house built of stone, and square like its neighbours, with prettily laid out flower-garden front and back, and receding from the latter a couple of acres of kitchen garden and orchard, the whole testifying to rich soil and admirable cultivation. Flowers, fruit, and vegetables were here in the utmost luxuriance, with choice roses, although the season was advanced. What, however, most struck me was the populousness of the widow's domain. As we entered the roomy, elegantly fitted up dwelling a ten-year-old girl ran up to its mistress for a kiss.

"My forewoman's little sister," madame informed me. "They have no friends living in the country who can receive them during the long vacation, so I have had both and a friend to stay with me. And, indeed, I am never alone," she added.

Pet dogs, a cat, and pigeons must of course be caressed; then I was introduced to the gardener and his wife, who acted the part of cook, my hostess being evidently on friendliest terms with her people here as in her business house. Delightful it was to witness this fellow-feeling, and to realize the family life of the villa, a domestic circle though not composed of kith and kin. It is less any place than its spirit that takes hold of the imagination. Amid these evidences of laboriously acquired wealth and open-handed dispensation and vicarious enjoyment, I could well understand a fact hitherto puzzling, namely, that the greatest woman-philanthropist of contemporary and indeed of historic France made her millions by shop-keeping!

The position of business women, won by sheer capacity and assiduousness, has been immensely strengthened by

Republican legislation. The Code Civil, as is shown elsewhere, bears hardly upon the sex. Step by step such injustice is being repaired. Thus by the law of 1897, for the first time women were entitled to act as witnesses in all civil transactions. Twenty years before an equally important measure had been passed, and women heads of business houses became electors of candidates for the *tribunaux de commerce*, or what may be called commercial parliaments. The members forming this tribunal are called *prud'hommes*,\* and are chosen alike from the ranks of employers and employed. Their business is to settle all matters in discussion or dispute, a share in the representation is, therefore, vital to feminine interests. Commercial tribunals in the interest of the productive classes are a creation of the Revolution, the first being opened by the Constituent Assembly. It was not till 1806 that *Conseils de prud'hommes* were organized in twenty-six industrial towns. The composition of those bodies was at first far from democratic, consisting half of masters, half of foremen and small employers. By a still more reactionary measure, in 1810 any council could imprison refractory workmen for three days. Doubtless ere long we shall find lady merchants and others, not only voting for the *prud'hommes*, but fulfilling their functions.

\* *Prud'homme*, Old French *preu d'homme*, or *preux d'homme*, from the dog Latin *prodem* (Darmsteter and Hatzfeld).

## CHAPTER XXII

# AN ASPIRANT TO THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

I LOVE Paris *Parisien*, the Paris not of cosmopolitan pleasure-seekers and idlers, but of the work-a-day world, Belleville and the Buttes Chaumont, the quays of the Canal St. Martin, the faubourg St. Antoine, above all, the Place de la Nation, with its monuments, sparkling basin fountains and shaded swards, Tuileries gardens of humble toilers.

And how the work-a-day adores its Paris! As I drove lately towards Montmartre, with a young business lady, whose home was in the eighteenth *arrondissement*, her face glowed with pleasure.

"These quarters are so animated, so bustling," she said, as she revelled in the sights of the living stream around. It seems paradoxical to say that an urban population lives abroad, but certainly Parisians, alike the rich and the poor, spend as little time as possible within four walls. When we compare the advantages gratuitously enjoyed out of doors with the minimum of air, light, and sunshine obtainable by modest purses within, we can understand why it is so.

What a contrast was presented to-day by the wide, sunny umbrageous boulevard Poissonière and our destination, a small interior on the third floor of a side street. "Space anyhow is dear in Paris," rejoined M. Bergeret's



sister upon the philosopher observing that time and space existed in imagination only.

Light and sunshine are higher priced still. The householder of narrow means must, above all, forego a cheerful look-out; and all windows, whether looking north or south, east or west, are taxed. How comes it about, readers may ask, that a tax presumably so unpopular should remain on the statute book?

Doors and windows were first assessed under the Directoire, twenty centimes only being charged per window in communes of less than five thousand souls, sixty in those of the two first storeys in communes of a hundred thousand. The new duty aroused a storm of opposition. "What!" cried a member of the Cinq Cents. "If I wish to put a window looking east in my house in order that I may adore nature at sun-rising, I must pay duty? If, in order to warm the chilly frame of my aged father, I want a southern outlet, I must pay duty? And if, in order to avoid the burning heat of Thermidor, I wish for an opening north, I must pay duty? Surely it is possible to chose an imposition less objectionable and odious!"

The levy was made, and, being increased later on, brought in sixteen million of francs. In 1900 the door and window tax produced thirty millions.

By a law of 1832 some modifications were made in favour of factories and workmen's dwellings, as I have said, but it certainly seems strange that some substitute for this source of revenue should not be devised. And a Parisian window is often no window in the proper sense of the term. Coloured glass is now much used, and when I asked a friend living at Passy the reason why, she replied, that it was to prevent neighbours from overlooking each other!

The tiny flat to which I was now introduced consisted of small parlour, a mere slip of a kitchen, and two bedrooms, all looking upon side walls, a craning of the neck

being necessary in order to get even a peep at the sky. But the little salon, with its pianette, pictures, and pretty carpet, wore a cheerful, home-like look, and gaily enough we sat down to tea, the party consisting of my young companion, our hostess and her son, a pupil of the Conservatoire, and an aspirant to the Comédie Française. Sunless, cribbed, cabined, and confined, this little Montmartre home might appear to outsiders, but it was irradiated with golden dreams, elated with airy hopes. Who could say? This youth, now giving his days to the conning of French plays and poetry, might attain an aspirant's crowning ambition, make his histrionic *début* in the house of Molière?

"You are working very hard?" I asked.

"All day long," was the reply.

"But," I said, "you must surely require an occasional break?"

"No," the youth rejoined. "I find, on the contrary, that if I go into the country for a single day's holiday I have lost ground. The memory must be constantly exercised."

"I presume that poetry is much easier to commit to memory than prose?"

"Infinitely, although both differ immensely in this respect, some writers being so much more difficult to remember than others."

"Molière, for instance, I should say?"

"You are right, Molière is one of the most difficult poets to get by heart; but practice is everything."

After discussing his methods of study and the system pursued at the Conservatoire, we passed on to contemporary drama. I mentioned a play I had just witnessed at the Français, whereupon he exclaimed, "Then you have seen my master," naming the leading actor, from whom he received lessons in declamation.

The drama in France is indeed as essentially a

profession as that of medicine, the law, or civil and military engineering; it is furthermore, and in contradistinction to these, of absolutely gratuitous attainment. Native talent is thus developed and fostered to the utmost. The greatest actors give students the benefit of their gifts and experience, day after day unwearily presiding at rehearsals.

Some readers doubtless may remember the delightful acting of Got—acting, I should say, that reached the high watermark. At the height of his fame and in the zenith of his powers, this consummate artist would take a daily class at the Conservatoire. The masterpieces of dramatic literature are rehearsed again and again, with the most minute attention to accent, expression, and gesture. It is at the Française indeed—the ambition of every student—that the French tongue is heard in its purity. In their indispensable dictionary Messrs. Hatzfeld and Darmsteter inform us that they have adhered to the pronunciation of the best Parisian society, which is generally adopted by the Comédie Française. No greater treat than a matinée in Molière's house can be enjoyed by a lover of French and French classic drama.

The Conservatoire or school of music and declamation was founded by the Convention, and inaugurated in 1793, when no less than six hundred pupils entered their names as students under Méhul, Grétry, and other masters. Already in 1784 musical and dramatic classes had been opened at Versailles under the direction of the Baron de Breteuil, the object in view being to provide the Trianon and royal theatre of Versailles with singers and players. In 1789 the Assembly took up the notion, the nucleus of a musical and dramatic school was transferred to Paris, and that same year it furnished no less than seventy-eight performers for the band of the National Guards. The Revolution, as has been remarked, was from first to last the most musical period of French history, and no doubt

music was a great power in moving spirits and aiding the revolutionary cause. The example of Paris was followed by Lille, Toulon, Dijon, Metz, Marseilles, Nantes, and other large towns, their musical schools being called *pépinières*, or nurseries. The "Chant du Départ" and the "Marseillaise" expressed the military side of the Revolution, the sentimental side was voiced in countless light airs recently unearthed by members of the *Société de l'histoire de la Révolution*. Had I not been familiar with French life, my young friend's general culture would have come as a surprise. Here was a youth of eighteen, who on leaving school had entered a commercial house, intelligently, nay discriminately, discussing literature and the drama, at that early age exemplifying what I regard as the quintessential characteristic of our neighbours, namely, the critical faculty. Already he was thinking out theories for himself, by no means content to take other folks' opinions at haphazard as if playing at cross and pile. Family feeling is an adamant chain in France.

"I have given up the larger bedroom to Henri, as you see," madame had said, when showing me over her tiny flat. "He spends so much time indoors that it is necessary he should have all the space and air possible."

And I could easily guess that the choice of such a career implied sacrifices of a more serious nature. By this time the student of the Conservatoire might have been bringing grist to the mill, earning as junior clerk perhaps two thousand francs a year. But the aspirant had fired his mother and sister with his own enthusiasm. Both utterly believed in the brilliant future foretold by youthful ambition. Moreover, the stage is held, and deservedly held, in high honour by our neighbours. Contemporary drama has usurped the functions of the pulpit without forfeiting its high claims as a school of classicism and culture; the stage, alike by tragedy and comedy, brings human nature face to face with social

vices and follies. Exemplifying this assertion, I need only mention one or two of the plays so successfully produced in leading theatres of late years, *Les Remplaçantes*, *La course du Flambeau*, *Divorce*, these among many others. By turns immorality, drunkenness, the wrongs caused by vicarious motherhood or wet nursing, and other phases of modern life are held up to reprobation and ridicule. Oftener, indeed, to weep rather than laugh, Parisians now fill the leading theatres.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER

**A**S we all know, education in France is non-sectarian, obligatory, and gratuitous. How much store is set by the splendid educational opportunities afforded every French child the following story will show.

Two years ago I was staying in Champagne with my friend Mademoiselle M——, the middle-aged daughter of a former schoolmaster. Not for the first time I enjoyed “harbour and good company” under her hospitable roof, making acquaintance with a charming little circle.

Mademoiselle M—— occupied her own roomy house, which stood on the outskirts of the little river-side town, a large fruit and vegetable garden at the back making pleasant shade; a small annuity and the letting of spare rooms completed her modest income, from the sum-total something ever remaining for benevolence. In a small way, indeed, mademoiselle was a veritable Providence to the waif and stray. The late schoolmaster had left his daughter a library of several hundred volumes, and the part of the house retained for her own use was most comfortably furnished. But, knowing how small are the emoluments of village pedagogues, I could not account for the numerous works of art and objects of luxury seen on every side. Every room seemed full of wedding presents!

One afternoon my hostess invited some neighbours to tea, and I ventured a comment upon the exquisite tea-service and silver-gilt plate set out in their honour.

"All gifts of pupils and pupils' parents to papa," was mademoiselle's reply; "and when my visitors are gone I will show you some other things. At the New Year and on his fête day, my father always received handsome presents; you see, he had been schoolmaster here so many years, and was so much beloved."

A list of the treasures now displayed or pointed out to me would fill a page. All represented considerable outlay, and all, be it remembered, were offered by small officials, artisans, and peasants. I especially noticed a liqueur service of elegant cut-glass, enclosed in a case of polished rosewood. Another costly gift was an ormolu clock surmounted with figures, that must have cost a hundred francs at least. The entire collection, I should say, represented several thousand francs; in each case we may be quite sure that these offerings involved, on the part of the donors, no little self-sacrifice. Here, then, was a palmary proof of the French peasant's progressiveness, of the high esteem in which he holds education. Excessive thrift and lavish generosity are not compatible, but next to his paternal acres he evidently values the hard-won privileges wrested from obscurantism and bigotry.

Immense is the change that has come over the village schoolmaster since I first made his acquaintance in Anjou more than a quarter of a century ago. The *instituteur* of the village in which I was then staying with French friends received £30 a year, besides lodging and trifling capitation fees. Both boys' and girls' schools were supported by the State, but, unfortunately, the commune had been induced some years before to accept a house and piece of land from some rich resident, the conditions being that the school for girls should always be kept by nuns. The consequence was that, as education at that period was not strictly obligatory, boys were detained on the farm, the number of scholars being only twenty, whilst the girls numbered sixty. Under such circumstances the capitation



TO THE VILLAGE SCHOOL



fee was hardly worth taking into account. What mattered much more was the inequality of the instruction accorded, the schoolmasters possessing certificates of proficiency, the nuns being free to teach provided that they possessed *une lettre d'obédience*, a kind of character signed by the bishop.

This difference was evidenced in the prize distribution, in which I was flatteringly invited to take part. Whilst the boys received amusing and instructive books of history, travel, and adventure, the girls got little theological treatises, the only attractive feature about them being gilt edges and a gaudy binding.

Pitiable in the extreme was the position of a village schoolmaster during the MacMahon Presidency, indigence being often the least of his tribulations. The butt of clerical animosity, speech, action, and manners of life ever open to misinterpretation—such was his position. The marvel is that candidates should be found for post so unenviable. Twenty-five years' strenuous fighting and endeavour have changed all this, and popular education in France is now the first in the world.

For the victory belongs to the Third Republic, as a retrospective glance will show. The *ancien régime* did not deem the R's a common necessity. Like house-sparrows depending upon stray crumbs, poor folks' children got here and there a modicum of knowledge, Danton's "bread of the understanding." In the more favoured provinces—Lorraine and Champagne, for instance—were village schoolmasters fulfilling at the same time the functions of grave-digger, sacristan, bell-ringer, and sometimes combining with these a trade or handicraft. In the commune of Angles, Hautes Alpes, the schoolmaster offered to shave all the inhabitants for a consideration of two hundred livres yearly! In very poor districts they were partly remunerated by meals taken alternately at the houses of their pupils. For want of a school-house, teaching, such as it was, had to be given in barns and stables,



and when spring came both master and pupils exchanged the cross-row, strokes and pothooks for labours afield. These wandering pedagogues were called *maitres ambulants*. In Provence schoolmasters were hired at fairs, as is still the case with domestics in Normandy.

One of the first preoccupations of Revolutionary leaders was the village school. Tallyrand laid a plan of popular education before the Constituant Condorcet drew up a scheme for the Legislative Assembly. The Convention revised and matured the respective systems of Barère, Lakanal, and others, but wars within and without the frontier, and want of finances, stood in the way. The noble project of non-sectarian, gratuitous, and obligatory instruction was adjourned for a century.

Napoleon did not care to waste thought or money upon the education of the people. The sum of 4250 francs, just £170, was deemed by him quite sufficient for such a purpose. The Restoration magnanimously increased these figures to 50,000 francs, the monarchy of July raised the sum-total to three millions, the Second Empire to twelve million francs. The budget of the Third Republic is a hundred and sixty million, municipalities and communes adding a hundred million more. This sum does not include the money spent upon the erection of schools, hundreds having been built both in town and country.

Instructive it was to zigzag through remote regions twenty years ago. I well remember an experience in the Burgundian highlands about this time. I was staying at Autun in order to be near my friends, the late Philip Gilbert Hamerton and his wife, and one day journeyed by diligence to Château Chinon, whilom capital of a little Celtic kingdom.

The five hours' ascent by splendid roads led through the very heart of the Morvan, wooded hills, gloomy forests, and masses of rocks framing brilliant pastures and little streams. Amid these thinly populated scenes, only a

straggling village or two passed on the way, one sign of progress met the eye—the village school in course of erection. Of all French provinces Brittany was worst off as regards schools. A generation ago travellers might interrogate well-clad men and women, who, not understanding a syllable of French, would shake their heads and pass on. At Nantes in 1875-6 the following inscription would meet my eyes: “Écrivain publique, 10 centimes par lettre” (“Public writer, a penny per epistle”). Women servants who could read, much more write, in that great, rich city were rare indeed. My hostess, widow of a late préfet, kept a well-paid cook, also a housemaid. The pair were both as illiterate as Hottentots.

All this belongs to the past. The noble dream of the Convention has been realized in its entirety. The Ferry laws of 1881 and 1882, for once and for all, have ensured for every boy and girl born within the French dominions that greatest heritage, a good education.

The following figures will show how the new state of things has affected both pupils and pedagogues.

In every *chef-lieu* and commune numbering over 6000 souls exists an upper and lower school for the people. The former, called the *école primaire supérieure*, or *collège communal*, was created so far back as 1833 by M. Guizot. The Ferry decrees considerably increased the number of these upper schools, as well as improving the condition of teachers. The course of instruction in communal colleges is essentially practical, being designed for those youths about to engage in commerce, industry, or agriculture.

The maximum pay of schoolmasters in the primary school is £104 a year, with allowance for lodging, making a sum-total of £136; the minimum salary is £40, with £3 allowed for lodging. Women teachers receive the same pay in elementary schools, but slightly less in the communal colleges for girls. Masters and mistresses alike must be provided with a certificate, the *brevet élémentaire*

sufficing for a post in the primary schools, the *brevet supérieure* being necessary for the *collège communal*. It will be seen, then, that my Champennois acquaintances of half a dozen years ago are in a very different position to the poor Angevin pedagogue of 1876 with his miserable £30 a year. And from a social point of view his advance has been far greater. Under the reactionary Mac-Mahon *régime* the *instituteur* was a pariah, as I wrote at the time, "There is no one more liable to censure and to political and social persecution; if not born a trimmer, able to please everybody, he pleases nobody, and has a hard time of it." If any reader doubts this assertion, I commend to his notice the writings of the late Jules Simon.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### JACQUES BONHOMME

THE evolution of the French peasant is the history of modern France. In the genesis of Jacques Bonhomme must be sought the origin of the Third Republic.

By bourgeois agency, in a single night the *ancien régime* was swept into limbo, became the survival of an irrevocable past. The legislators of the two Assemblies and the Convention, with those of the present Palais Bourbon, belonged to the middle and professional classes.

It was by peasant-born commanders that newly acquired liberties were guaranteed, by recruits torn from the plough that the combined forces of Europe were held at bay. To talk of "the French peasant" is to express one's self loosely. Not for a moment must we narrow the conception of Jacques Bonhomme to that of our own Hodge, still, as fifty years ago, earning a weekly pittance, and in old age depending on parish relief.

The French peasant possesses France. He may or may not be in easy circumstances, happy, enlightened; he is neither the degraded being portrayed by Zola and De Maupassant, nor perhaps the ideal rustic of George Sand's fascinating page. We must know him in order to get at the mean, to measure his qualities and aptitudes. To appreciate him as a social and political force personal acquaintance is not necessary; so much the history of the last thirty-five years teaches us. But for the invested

savings of the thrifty countryman, Thiers' task of liberating French territory from the Prussian invader might have been indefinitely prolonged. And since that terrible time, whenever the ship of State has been in deadly peril Jacques Bonhomme has acted the part of pilot bringing her safely to port, his *rôle* upon critical occasions saving the Republic.

Readers of "La Terre" who do not know rural France must ask themselves, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" The peasant-born rulers, legislators, scientists, and *litterati* of France, how are they to be accounted for? History affords the clue.

Recent examination of provincial archives shows us the slow but steady evolution of the countryman. Rousseau's well-known story of the peasant who, suspecting him to be a fiscal agent, affected direst neediness, and on discovering his error repaired it by open-hearted hospitality, was doubtless no exceptional case. Despite exorbitant taxation and unimaginable hindrances alike to material and moral advancement, here and there small owners and even labourers educated their sons, dowered their daughters, and laid by a little money.

In 1688 no less than forty-two sons of peasant proprietors and day labourers attended the upper classes of the college of Le Mans. In many communes, despite their fiscal and feudal burdens, the inhabitants subscribed among themselves in order to pay a schoolmaster. Many distinguished Frenchmen thus obtained their first instruction, among these the erudite Mabillon, Villars, the botanist of Dauphiné and Thénard, the eminent chemist, son of a poor peasant.\* On this subject the testamentary documents and inventories preserved in provincial archives are very illuminating.

Among the belongings of one day labourer in 1776

\* See the works of A. Babeau : "La vie Rurale dans l'Ancienne France," "L'École de Village," etc., etc.



we find a psalter and three books of "L'Imitation de Jésus Christ;" of another, "Une Vie des Saints" and "Les Évangiles;" whilst a third (Archives de l'Aube, 1772) was the possessor of two folios, viz. "L'Anatomie de l'homme" and "Le véritable Chirurgien." A fourth possessed a Latin dictionary, whilst musical instruments not infrequently figure in these inventories. It will thus be seen that anterior to the memorable Fourth of August the peasant was raising himself and was awake to the value of instruction. He might echo the refrain so popular in Auvergne—

" Le pauvre laboureur  
Est toujours tourmenté,  
Payant à la gabelle  
Et les deniers un roi ;  
Toujours devant sa porte,  
Garnison and sergent,  
Qui crieront sans cesse,  
Apportez de l'argent." \*

But by dint of unimaginable thrift and laboriousness he contrived to have something worth willing away. Pre-revolutionary wills show a catholicity of sentiment undreamed of in Zola's philosophy. A labourer in 1752, for instance, after bequeathing the bulk of his little property to his children, leaves four *arpents* † of cultivable land to the village church, thereby assuring perpetual masses for his soul and that of his wife, and remembers his day-labourers and woman servant by gifts of money and clothes (Archives de l'Aube).

Even dairymaids made their wills. Thus in 1685 a certain Edmée Lambert, in the employ of Jacques Lajesse, *étant au liet malade, saine toutefois de bon propos, mémoires et*

\* Trans. "The poor labourer is perpetually harassed, paying salt tax and king's tax, always having at his door bailiff and sergeant, who never leave off crying, 'Money, money!'" *Garnison* was the putting in possession till taxes were paid. See "The Tax Collector."

† The *arpent* was a variable measure containing a hundred perches more or less.

*entendement* ("sick abed, but possessed of all her faculties"), bequeaths a plot of ground and a crown (value from three to six livres or francs) to her parish church, in order that perpetual masses may be said for her soul; a *panier à mouche*\* to her master, "for the trouble he had taken about her;" a second *panier à mouche* to a young fellow-servant of the other sex, "as a token of friendship;" finally, the rest of her belongings, goods and money, to the wife of a neighbour, "in consideration of her goodwill and amity."

The testatrix being unable to write, the will was signed by the curé in presence of two witnesses. These wills were always drawn up by a notary and attested by two witnesses. "*In nomine Domini, Amen*" was the invariable formula with which these documents began.

Equally instructive are marriage contracts. In 1611, the brother of Jeanne Graveyron, on her marriage with a labourer, gives her as dowry, five livres † for the expenses of the wedding, thirty-five livres to keep, a bed, bedstead with hangings and bedclothes, sundry kitchen utensils, three new gowns, and a chest, *fermant à clef* (with lock and key), containing personal and household linen. The daughter of a labourer receives five measures of wine, four of wheat, and the sum of ninety livres *en dot et chancère* ‡ *pour tous ses droits paternels et maternels* ("as a dowry, paternal and maternal").

Such facts as these help us to understand the unique position of the French peasant, no other country in the world showing his compeer. From century to century, from generation to generation, the rural population of France has been materially and morally progressive. That at the present day sixty-three per cent. of the inhabitants of communes numbering two thousand souls and under should occupy houses of their own, bears out the first position; that

\* *Panier à mouche*, "a beehive." Bees are still called *mouches* in some provinces.

† The livre, formerly from twenty to twenty-five sous in value.

‡ *Chancère*, dowry in land.



"A SMALL THING BUT MY OWN" (SAINTONGE)









THE RETURN FROM MARKET

alike in statesmanship, arms, science, and letters sons of peasants have risen to the first rank supports the latter. Not all provinces show the same degree of intelligence and well-being. Climate, soil, means of communication, differences of tenure, affect the small farmer. Here we find comparative wealth, there a struggle with inadvertitious circumstances. Thus the phylloxera brought about the temporary ruin of thousands, the sum-total of loss reaching that paid into Prussian coffers after the last war. There is indeed a gamut beginning with the humble *métayer* but yesterday a hired labourer, and ending with the wealthy owner of acres added to from year to year.

A contemporary novelist, in his sketches of rural life, draws the mean between "La Terre" and George Sand's idylls. M. René Bazin, in his "Terre qui meurt," however, writes with a purpose; characterization plays a secondary part. This writer evidently regards peasant property and peasant life as conditions on the wane. And another well-known writer asserts that certain districts of France are daily suffering more and more from depopulation.\* Year by year emigration citywards increases, and individualism, too, is rather on the increase than otherwise.

Interrogated on this point, a large landowner in central France thus lately expressed himself to me—

"I do not hold with M. René Bazin's views. On the contrary, I rejoice that our young men show more initiative, more readiness to quit the paternal roof and make their way elsewhere, especially in the colonies; France has too long fostered inertness and nostalgia. It is high time that our youth should manifest more enterprize and independence."

The patriarchal order of things is not always ideal. Thrift, too often taking the form of avarice, and paternal feeling are among the peasant's foremost characteristics. Laborious devotion to the patrimony of sons and successors

\* M. Octave Uzanne, in the *Independent Review* for April.

is sometimes poorly rewarded. Neither among the opulent nor toiling masses do adulated children invariably prove dutiful. According to De Maupassant and other writers of his school, exaggerated parental fondness and self-sacrifice are frequently as pearls cast before swine. The hoarder-up for sons and daughters in his old age comes to be regarded as a burden. And in any case a burden imposed by law, *La dette alimentaire*, Art. 205, 207 of the Code Civil, not only obliges sons and daughters, but sons and daughters in law, to support their parents and those of their partners by marriage.

If Balzac, George Sand, and Zola have failed to portray the French peasant as he is, how can a foreigner hope for success? According to M. Octave Uzanne, Balzac, though a seer, an observant genius, has here only partially succeeded; Zola, in "La Terre," has given us mere pitiful caricatures; George Sand, nineteenth-century pastorals, vague, fanciful, imaginative.

I can only summarize the impressions of twenty-five years, and speak of Jacque Bonhomme as I have found him.

It has been my good fortune and privilege to join hands with the peasant folk of Anjou in the round, old and young footing it merrily under the warm twilight heavens; to crown the little *lauréats*, or prize-winners of communal schools; to witness signatures and marriage registers in country churches; and to sit out rustic wedding feasts, lasting four or five hours! Many and many a time have I driven twenty miles across Breton solitudes, my driver and sole companion being a peasant in blue blouse, his bare feet thrust in sabots. Again and again has the small farmer, or *métayer*, quitted his work in order to show me his stock and answer my numerous and sometimes, I fear, indiscreet questions. Often, too, have I sat down to the midday *table d'hôte* of country towns on market days, the guests all belonging to one class. Their Sunday suits of broad cloth protected by the blue cotton blouse, sparing





IN THE VINEYARD



of words, swiftly degustating the varied meal set before them, these farmers would put to and drive home as soon as buying and selling were over, the attractions of a fair proving no lure. And here, there, and everywhere on French soil have I enjoyed rural hospitality. On the borders of Spain, within a stone's throw of the new Prussian frontier, in the vine-growing villages of Burgundy, and farmhouses of rich Normandy, in scattered Cévenol homesteads, on the banks of the Loire, the Marne, and many a beautiful river besides, in remote Breton hamlets have I ever found cheery welcome and an outspread board, humble or choice as the case might be. Whatever faults he may or may not possess, the French peasant is hospitality itself. I will here narrate a characteristic incident. A few years since I revisited a little Norman town, and was anxious to call upon a farmer and his wife living near who had shown me much kindness when first staying in the neighbourhood. Not wishing to surprise them at their midday meal, I lunched with my travelling companion at a little inn, afterwards sitting on a bench outside whilst our horse was being put to. A countrywoman, evidently a farmer's wife, who was also awaiting her vehicle, sat near with her marketings.

"So you are going to see Madame C——?" she asked, after a little chat; "an old friend of mine. But how sorry she will be that you did not go to dinner!" she added; "that you should sit down to table in an inn when you were only a mile and a half off!"

And true enough, our former hostess chided me with real chagrin.

"You would have been so welcome to what we had," she said; "not perhaps all that we should wish to set before friends, but," she added gaily, "when there is less to eat, one eats less, that is all."

The less was here, of course, used numerically, not standing for a smaller quantity, but for fewer dishes.

A word here about the destitute and aged poor. Whilst in every French town we find handsome schools, generally a training college for teachers, and museum as well, one suburban building to which English eyes are accustomed is missing. The workhouse is unknown. *Asiles*, so-called, for homeless old people, and orphanages for waifs and strays abound; these are the outcome of no poor-law, instead the organization of Catholic charity, and entirely under Catholic management, often mismanagement. Recent revelations concerning the homes of the Bon Pasteur bear out this assertion.

It must not be inferred that the State is indifferent to its least fortunate subjects.

Already in 1791 the care of the indigent and the infirm was proclaimed a national charge by the Constituent Assembly. The principle was not only upheld, but put into practice, by the Convention; and, strange to say, many altruistic and hygienic measures were carried out during the violent Hébertist period, among these being the humane treatment of the insane, the teaching of the blind by means of raised letters, and the deaf and dumb by lip speech. In 1801 Napoleon, then First Consul, created a *Conseil général de l'Assistance publique*, or body charged with the administration of national relief. The budget devoted to this purpose in 1904 reached the sum of 140 millions of francs, the city of Paris alone spending fifty millions upon her sick, helpless, and abandoned poor. But help can never be claimed by those having children in a position to support them. In country places, when such is not the case, and the matter is proved past question, the commune acts the part of foster-parents, or, if a good Catholic, the unfortunate burden on his fellows finds harbourage in some orphanage of a religious house. I was once staying in an Angevin village of a few hundred souls; only one inhabitant depended upon communal aid. Peasant ownership and pauperism are quarrelsome bedfellows. The small farmer





DARBY AND JOAN (VENDÉE)

may have to put up with a shrewish daughter-in-law in his failing years. A thousand times more endurable to his proud independent spirit the Regan or Goneril of his own roof-tree than the soft-voiced sister of a charitable house !

Dignity I should set down as the leading, the quint-essential characteristic of the French peasants ; next to this quality, a purely mental one—that of shrewdness, oftentimes carried to the point of cunning ; and thirdly must be put foresight, taking the form of thrift. He is unique, a type apart. Jacques Bonhomme has his faults and shortcomings with the rest of mortal born. He may occasionally remind us of Zola's caricatures or De Maupassant's scathing portraiture, rarely may we encounter George Sand's ideals. But as a moral, intellectual, and social type, he stands alone, in his person representing the homely virtues, the mental equilibrium, the civic stability which, if they do not make, at least maintain, the surpassing greatness of France.



## CHAPTER XXV

### RESTAURANT-KEEPING IN PARIS

THROUGHOUT a long and varied experience of French life, I have ever made it my rule to associate with all sorts and conditions of men. With no little pleasure, therefore, I lately received the following invitation:—

“Our Marcel,” lately wrote an old friend, “has just taken over a large restaurant in Paris, and my husband and myself are helping the young couple through the first difficult months. Pray pay us an early visit when next here. We shall be delighted to see you to *déjeuner* or dinner.”

Madame J—— *mère*, the writer of these lines, belongs to a close ring, a marked class, to that consummate feminine type—the French business woman. Search the world through and you will not match the admirable combination, physical and mental powers nicely balanced, unsurpassed aptitude for organization and general capacity putting outsiders to the blush.

Well pleased with the prospect of fresh insight into *bourgeois* life, a week or two later I started for Paris, my first visit being paid to Marcel's restaurant. I had known the young proprietor from his childhood, and Marcel he still remained to me.

What a scene of methodical bustle the place presented! I was here in the region known as *Le Sentier*—that part

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of Paris lying near the Bourse, made up of warehouses and offices, in some degree answering to our own city.

It was now noon, the Parisian hour of *déjeuner*, for in business quarters the midday meal is still so called, lunch being adopted by society and fashionable hotels only. Marcel's *clientèle* is naturally commercial and cosmopolitan. In flocked Germans, Russians, Italians, Japanese, with, of course, English. The Nijni Novgorod Fair could hardly be more of a Babel. In a very short time the three large dining-rooms were filled with well-dressed men and women of all nationalities, no sooner one occupant throwing down his napkin than the linen of his table being changed with what looked like legerdemain, a veritable sleight-of-hand. That changing of napery for each guest bespeaks the conduct of the restaurant. Here, indeed, and at a few similar establishments in Paris, are to be had scrupulous cleanliness and well-cooked viands of first-rate quality at the lowest possible price.

One franc seventy-five centimes (one and fivepence halfpenny) is the fixed tariff both at *déjeuner* and dinner. For this small sum the client is entitled to half a pint of a good *vin ordinaire*, a *hors d'œuvre*—i.e. bread and butter with radishes, anchovies, or some other appetizing trifle—and the choice of two dishes from a very varied bill of fare.

As I glanced at the list, I noted with some surprise that many expensive meats were included—salmon, game, and poultry, for instance. Monsieur J—— *père* smilingly enlightened me on the subject.

"You should accompany me one morning at five o'clock to the Halles," he said; "you would then understand the matter. Every day I set out, accompanied by two men-servants with hand-trucks, which they bring back laden—fish, meat, vegetables, eggs, butter, poultry, and game. I buy everything direct from the vendors, thus getting provisions at wholesale prices. Some articles are always cheap, whilst others are always dear. I set one against

the other. Take soles, for instance : soles are always high-priced in Paris, but at the markets the other day I bought up an entire lot, several dozen kilos, and the consequence was that they cost me no more than herrings ! ”

As monsieur and madame the elder and myself chatted over our excellent *déjeuner*, the young master was busily helping his waiters, whilst his wife, perched at a high desk, made out the bills and received money. Folks trooped in and trooped out ; tables were cleared and re-arranged with marvellous rapidity. Waiters rushed to and fro balancing half a dozen dishes on one shoulder, as only Parisian waiters can, meals served being at the rate of two a minute !

“Next in importance to the quality of the viands,” my informant went on, “is the excellence of the cooking. We keep four cooks, each a *chef* in his own department, no apprentices, or *gâte-sauces*, as we call them. One of our cooks is a *rôtisseur*, his sole business being to roast ; another is a *saucier*, who is entirely given up to sauce-making——”

Here my old friend stopped, my intense look of amusement exciting his own, and, indeed, the matter seemed one for mirth, also for a humiliating comparison. Since the utterance of Voltaire’s scathing utterance, England pilloried as the benighted country of one sauce, how little have we progressed ! In a London restaurant how many sauces could we select from in sitting down to an eighteen-penny meal ? Probably two or three, *i.e.* mint-sauce in May and apple-sauce in October, throughout the rest of the year contenting ourselves with melted butter. Truly, they manage these things better in France. I dare aver that here the thrice-favoured diner could enjoy a different sauce on each day of the year. Again, I could not help making another comparison. The unhappy *rôtisseur* ! What a terrible sameness, that perpetual roasting from January to December ! The *saucier*, on the contrary, must

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be set down as a highly favoured individual, having a quite unlimited field for the play of fancy and imagination.

"The third cooks vegetables, and the fourth prepares soups and stews. Pastry and ices, being in comparatively small demand, are supplied from outside. We employ four waiters——"

Here, a second time, I could not resist an ejaculation of surprise. At least a score of the nimblest, most adroit beings imaginable seemed on duty, so lightning-like their movements that each, in a sense, quadrupling himself, appeared to be in several places at once. That marvellous adjusting of a dozen dishes, the shoulder doing duty as a dumb waiter, is another surprising feat, perhaps explained as follows: A friend of my own attributes French nimbleness to a difference in the seat of gravity. Why do French folks never slip on floors and stairs, however highly polished? Because, he says, their centre of gravity differs from our own. Be this as it may, French plates and dishes, when overturned, are attracted to the ground precisely like Newton's apple.

"Our waiters receive wages," my informant went on, "and of course get a great deal in tips, sometimes a hundred francs to divide between them in a day. Out of this, however, they have to pay for breakages, and immense numbers of plates and dishes are smashed in the course of the year."

If Frenchmen can keep their feet under circumstances perilous to the rest of the world, they are naturally not proof against shocks. And in these crowded dining-rooms the wonder is that accidents were not constantly occurring.

*Déjeuner* over, Madame J—— *mère* accompanied me for a stroll on the boulevard. What a difference between the Paris *Sentier* and the London City!

The weather was neither balmy nor sultry, yet the broad pavement of the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle was

turned into a veritable recreation ground. Here, in the very heart of commercial Paris, as in the Parc Monceaux or the Champs Élysées, ladies and nursemaids sat in rows, whilst children trundled their hoops or played ball. So long as out-of-door life is practicable, French folks will not spend the day within four walls, this habit, perhaps, greatly accounting for the national cheerfulness. Delightful it was to see how old and young enjoyed themselves amid the prevailing noise and bustle, the enormously wide pavement having room for all. The boulevard is, indeed, alike lounge, playground, and promenade. On the boulevard is focussed the life of Paris, and, to my thinking, nowhere is this life more worth studying than in the immediate neighbourhood of the noble Porte St. Denis.

As we strolled to and fro I had a very interesting and suggestive conversation with Madame J——, senior, and as her share of it throws an interesting light upon French modes of thought, I venture to repeat a portion.

"Yes," she said, "my husband and myself are both well pleased with our daughter-in-law. She brought our son no fortune——"

"No fortune?" I interrupted, incredulously.

"That is to say, no fortune to speak of, nothing to be called a dowry. When advising Marcel as to the choice of a wife we did not encourage him to look out for money; on the contrary, whilst he could have married into moneyed families, he chose, with our approbation, a portionless girl, but one well fitted by character and education to be an aid and companion to her husband. Suppose, for instance, that he had married a girl, say, with capital bringing in two or three thousand francs a year. She would have been quite above keeping the books and living in the restaurant, and most likely would have needed her entire income for dress and amusements. No, it is very bad policy for a young man who has his way to make to look out for a *dot*. I have always found it so, more than one



young man of my acquaintance having been ruined by a pretentious and thriftless wife. My daughter-in-law, as you see, takes kindly to her duties and position. She is amiable, intelligent, and simple in her habits. With such a wife Marcel is sure to get on."

For the next few years this young couple will give their minds entirely to business, foregoing comfort, ease, and recreation in order to insure the future and lay the foundations of ultimate fortune. By-and-by, when affairs have been put on a sure footing, they will take a pretty little flat near. Monsieur's place will be occasionally taken by a head waiter; madame's duties at the desk relegated to a lady book-keeper. English and French ideals of life differ. To the French mind any sacrifices appear light when made in the interest of the future—above all, the future of one's children. Doubtless by the time this young *restaurateur* and his wife have reached middle age they will have amassed a small fortune, and, long before old age overtakes them, be able to retire.

Let no one suppose that sordidness is the necessary result of such matter-of-fact views. Here, at least, high commercial standard and rules of conduct go hand-in-hand with uncompromising laboriousness and thrift; for in France the stimulus to exertion, the lodestar of existence, the corner-stone of domestic polity, is concern for the beings as yet unborn, the worthy foundation of a family.

The super-excellent education now received by every French citizen is not thrown away. I found restaurant-keeping by no means incompatible with literary and artistic taste—an intelligent appreciation of good books, good pictures, and good music.

On our return to the restaurant for tea, we found the large dining-rooms deserted except for three somnolent figures in one corner. One waiter was enjoying his afternoon out; his companions were getting a nap, with their feet on chairs. All was spick and span—in readiness for



the invasion at six o'clock. Meantime, we had the place to ourselves.

In the midst of our tea-drinking, however, a gentlemanly-looking individual, wearing a tall hat and frock-coat, entered, and, after a short colloquy with the young master, passed out again.

"You would never guess that gentleman's errand," Marcel said, smiling as he re-seated himself at the tea-table.

"He looked to me like a rather distinguished customer," I replied; "some Government functionary on half-pay, or small *rentier*."

Marcel smiled again.

"That well-dressed gentleman, then, supplies us with tooth-picks, which his wife makes at home. He calls once a month, and our orders amount to about a franc a day. I dare say he and his wife between them make from thirty to forty francs a week, and contrive to keep up appearances upon that sum. It is an instance of what we call *la misère dorée*" ("gilded poverty").

Truly one lives to learn. That retailer of *cure-dents*, in his silk hat and frock-coat, was another novel experience of Parisian life—an experience not without its pathos. I shall not easily forget the gentlemanly-looking man with his long *favoris* and his odd industry. I add that the Paris City—i.e. *Le Sentier*—since July last has followed English initiative, warehouses and offices being now closed herein from noon on Saturday till Monday morning.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HOURS IN VAL-DE-GRÂCE

"I HATE sights," wrote Charles Lamb, and with myself the speech touches a sympathetic chord. I do not suppose that I should ever have visited the Church of Val-de-Grâce; certainly I should never have crossed the threshold of the great military hospital as a sightseer. But a few years ago an old and valued friend was invalided within its walls, and I ran over to Paris for the purpose of seeing him. The handsome Romanesque Church of Val-de-Grâce was built in the reign of Louis XIV., and the hospital occupies the site of an ancient abbey, but Napoleonic memories are recalled at every step. As you approach the Observatoire a bronze statue meets your eyes—that of "Le brave des braves," the lion-hearted Ney, who fell here on a December morning in the year of Waterloo.

"Soldats, droit au cœur!" ("Soldiers, straight at the heart"!) he shouted, his last word of command as he confronted the companions-in-arms charged with his execution.

In front of the hospital stands another and much finer statue—David d'Anger's bronze figure of Larrey, Napoleon's army surgeon. "The most virtuous man I ever met with," declared the Emperor at St. Helena, when handsomely remembering him in his will.

Larrey was not only a great surgeon and the initiator of many modern methods, he was a great moral inventor.

Attached to the Army of the Rhine in 1792, he thereupon organized the first ambulance service introduced in warfare, later adopted throughout Europe. After serving in twenty-five campaigns, including the expedition to Moscow, and narrowly escaping with his life at Waterloo, Larrey died at the post of duty in 1842. The inspection of a fever hospital in Algeria brought on an illness which terminated his noble career.

It was a bright afternoon in April when I paid my first visit to Val-de-Grâce. What a contrast did that gloomy interior present to the sunny, animated, tumultuous world without! In spring and early summer the Paris boulevards have very little in common with the crowded thoroughfares of other cities. The stately avenues of freshly budded green, the children making a playground of the broad pavement, the groups of loungers quaffing their coffee or lemonade amid oleander and pomegranate trees, the gaily moving crowds, make up a whole impossible to match elsewhere. "The cheerful ways of men" are more than cheerful here. One feels exhilarated, one knows not why. Inexpressibly dreary seemed the vast building in which my friend had spent many months.

"Il n'est pas bien gai ici" ("It is not very lively here"), was all he said, as we sat down for a chat. The French soldier never complains. The commandant's windows overlooked the garden, now showing freshly budded foliage; sparrows twittered joyously among the branches, sunshine flooded the place, yet nothing could well be more depressing.

Sick and disabled soldiers sunned themselves on the benches or hobbled up and down the straight walks. Here was a white-faced convalescent recovering from malaria contracted in Algeria, there a victim to acute sciatica brought on by exposure in the French Alps; a third had been stricken by sunstroke in Tonkin; a fourth had succumbed to fatigue during the last autumn's manœuvres;

the majority, as was the case with my friend, having sacrificed health to duty in times of peace. There was indescribable pathos in the aspect of these invalided soldiers.

In French civil hospitals the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul add a picturesque element. At Val-de-Grâce the nursing staff consists entirely of men. Each officer who pays a certain sum for accommodation has a soldier told off to wait upon him, often some conscript who has chosen hospital service instead of life in barracks. Medical students frequently serve their term as nurses or attendants, the interval being utilized practically. Seminarists also prefer the hospital to the camp.

The commandant's room was furnished with Spartan simplicity, but doubtless with all that he wanted—an iron bedstead, an armchair, a second chair for a visitor, pegs for coats and dressing-gowns, a toilet table with drawers, a centre table on which lay a few newspapers, a somewhat shabby volume of Herbert Spencer translated into French, and another volume or two. Pianos are out of place in a hospital, otherwise I should most certainly have found here that incomparable lightener of gloom and solitude, my friend being an enthusiastic musician. His long convalescence had now—alas! for the time being only—come to an end, and he was shortly about to resume his post in one of the provinces.

"The winter months seemed long. How I should have got through them without my comrade D——'s visits Heaven only knows," he said, adding sadly, "I shall never be able to repay such devotion—never, never!"

This brother officer, now stationed in Paris, had been a school and college comrade. The pair were knit by brotherly affection, addressing each other with the charming "thee" and "thou" of the Quakers. The one was in fine health, and rapidly rising in his profession; the other's equally hopeful career had been checked by illness

contracted in discharge of his duties. No shadow dimmed their friendship.

The commandant went on to tell me how hardly a winter day had passed without D——'s cheery visit. No matter the weather—rain might be falling in torrents, sleet and snow might be blinding, a fierce east wind might make the strongest wince—at some hour or other he would hear the thrice welcome footsteps outside, in would burst his friend with cheery handshake and enlivening talk. The long invalid's day was broken, whiffs from the outer world cheered the dreary place, warm affection gladdened the sick man's heart. Despite weather, distance, and the obligations of an onerous service, his comrade made time for a visit. Making time in this case is no misuse of words. Only those familiar with military routine in France can realize what such devotion really meant. An officer in garrison has comparatively an easy time of it to that of his fellow-soldier in the bureau, whose work is official rather than active. These indefatigable servants of the State, from the highest to the most modest ranks, receive very moderate emoluments, and voluntarism is not compatible with military discipline. Little margin of leisure is left to the busy officer.

As I have said, French soldiers never complain. With them the post of duty is ever the post of honour. The commandant's terrible illness had been brought on by the supervision of engineering works on the Franco-Italian frontier during an Arctic winter.

"Climate, climate!" he said. "There is the soldier's redoubtable enemy alike in times of war and peace. I started on this survey in fine health, and returned a wreck. You see, I had come from the south, and the change was too sudden and too great. I was often obliged to start with my comrades for a long drive at dawn and in an open vehicle amid blinding snow. At other times we had to take bridle-paths on horseback,



often a little girl acting as guide. You may be sure we comforted the poor child with food and hot wine at the first auberge reached, but these dales folk are a hardy race. What is a dangerous ordeal to others is a trifle to them. I lost my health in those regions. *Mais que voulez vous?* A soldier does not choose his post."

During the following days we took several drives, the sunshine, the April foliage, the general animation imparting temporary oblivion of past sufferings and anxiety concerning the future. It was something to feel that he would shortly be at work once more, and if his strength should finally give way—" *Alors, le repos éternel,*" he would say with a sad smile.

Devoted to music, eminently sociable, largely endowed with the French aptitude—rather, I will say, genius—for friendship, no man was ever more fitted to enjoy life. In earlier years, as a comrade had said of him, *il était la gaieté même* ("he had been gaiety itself"). In these pleasant hours abroad the old self came back; a more delightful cicerone in Paris you could not have. We did not spend our time in sightseeing, but in the forenoon strolled through the markets, revelling in the sight of flowers, fruit, and vegetables, or, after *déjeuner*, chatted over a newspaper in some square or public garden, and a cup of coffee or glass of sirop and water on the boulevard, taking a long drive or turning into some place of popular entertainment. My short stay passed all too quickly, but we met elsewhere in the autumn, and again and again would the old self come back.

But such gleams of revived health and spirits were transitory. After a brief resumption of service the commandant retired on half pay, not too long having to wait for *le repos éternel*, so much more welcome to him than valetudinarianism and enforced inactivity, the Legion of Honour his sole reward in lifetime—strange to say, that reward not entitling him to a soldier's grave.

There is something appalling in the expeditiousness with which one's friends are hurried into the tomb in France. Three months after spending some days near the invalid, and a few days only after receiving a note from him, came tidings of last illness, death, and interment, twenty-four hours only separating the last two. And some months later I learned that an officer on half pay, no matter how distinguished, is not entitled to burial in that part of a cemetery set apart for military men. Unless a site is purchased beforehand, or by his representatives, a military funeral is followed by interment in the common burial-ground. And this is what happened in my friend's case—a circumstance, I hardly know why, filling me with hardly less sadness than the news of his death itself.

But that lonely far-off grave is ever carefully tended, for flowers and shrubs brighten it. From time to time a tiny nosegay gathered therefrom reaches the home of his unforgetting English friend.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### MY JOURNEY WITH MADAME LA PATRONNE

THE gist of French travel, to my thinking, lies in French companionship. Native eyes help to sharpen our own, and native wit enlivens every passing incident. Incomplete, indeed, had been my own survey of rural France without such aid and stimulus, and to no fellow-traveller do I owe more than to the *patronne* of a popular hotel "east of Paris." Our journey, moreover, was made under circumstances so novel and piquant that it stands by itself.

A wife at sixteen, afterwards mother of several children, and co-manageress with her husband of a large establishment by the time she was barely of age, Madame C——'s aptitude for business and organization would have been remarkable in any other country. With Julius Cæsar this clear-headed little Frenchwoman—at the time I write of middle-aged—could do three things at once; that is to say, she could add up figures whilst giving orders to cook or chambermaids and answering miscellaneous questions put by English tourists. Interruptions that would prove simply maddening to other folks did not confuse or irritate her in the very least. Equally admirable was her dealing with practical details, the discriminating choice of subordinates, methodical conduct of daily routine, the thoroughness of her supervision. Let it not for a moment be presumed that hotel-keeping and attention to maternal duties shut

out other interests. To the utmost she had profited by an excellent middle-class education, was well versed in French classic literature, could enjoy good music and art, and on half-holidays would take her children to the magnificent town museum, *pour former leurs idées*, in order to cultivate their minds. That books were more to her than mere pastime the following incident will show.

We were one day discussing favourite authors, when she told me that during a recent convalescence she had re-read Corneille's plays right through, adding—

“And in each discovering new beauties ; it is the same with all great writers.”

The *patronne* of the Écu d'Or was not only charming company, but a devoted friend ; and when a few years ago I wanted a fellow-traveller, I luckily bethought myself of my actual hostess. The proposal was accepted. Monsieur, ever solicitous of his wife's pleasure, cheerfully undertook double duty for a fortnight, and in high spirits we set off.

It was, I believe, Madame C——'s first journey as a tourist since her wedding trip, often the only trip of a busy Frenchwoman's life. Perhaps had she overrun Europe after the manner of the modern globe-trotter, she would not have proved so genial and informing a companion. No one can really love France or appreciate French scenery like a native. A close and accurate observer, Madame C——, whilst perpetually increasing her own knowledge, was ever pointing out features I might otherwise have missed. Again, when she criticized, it was without the superciliousness of foreign observers. Meantime, the weather was perfect. Never had the Burgundian landscape looked richer or more glowing ; never were travellers more enticingly beckoned onward by vista after vista of vine-clad hills, sunlit valleys, and blue mountain range.

The kind of freemasonry that binds professional bodies together exists among members of what is called in France



*le haut commerce*, or more important commercial ranks. On arriving at our destination in Savoy I soon discovered this, and that, as I have said, however delightful French travel may be with a sympathetic English friend, native companionship introduces a novel and highly agreeable element. The mistresses of the Écu d'Or and Lion Rouge now met for the first time, but their husbands had corresponded on business matters, their callings were identical, and general circumstances on a par. Children on both sides proved a further bond of union. Intercourse was straightway put on the footing of old acquaintanceship. As warm a welcome was extended to myself, and such friendliness amazingly transforms the atmosphere of a big hotel. Our hostess's husband being absent, her time was more taken up than usual, and the greater part of our own was spent abroad. We took our meals in the public dining-room, ordering what we wanted as any other tourists would have done, yet somehow we seemed and felt at home. And most instructive to me were the confabulations of the two ladies when leisure admitted of tea or coffee in Madame F——'s cosy little *bureau*, or office and parlour combined. What most struck me about these prolonged chats was the sense of parental responsibility shown by these busy mothers. Madame C—— had three boys, Madame F—— a marriageable daughter, the group forming an inexhaustible topic. The various aptitudes and temperaments of each child, the future, after most careful deliberation, marked out for them, were discussed again and again. One remark my friend of the Écu d'Or made about her two elder sons impressed me much, evincing, as it did, a painstaking study of character from the cradle upwards.

"My husband and I had wished to set up Pierre and Frédéric in business together," she said, "but we find as they grow older that natures so opposite as theirs would never harmonize. Some young people are improved by



coming into contact with their antipodes, but the experiment would not answer with our boys. I have watched them both narrowly, and am convinced that they will be better apart."

No less circumstantial was the *patronne* of the Lion Rouge regarding her eighteen-year-old Marie.

As I listened I got no mere glimpse, but real insight into bourgeois ideals of the daughter, wife, mother, and very worthy ideals they were. Marie's education had been, first and foremost, practical. The practical element in a French lycée for girls is much more conspicuous than in our own high schools, and the lycée now has very largely supplemented the more restricted education of the convent school. Especially insisted upon in the curriculum are such subjects as book-keeping and domestic management, both highly important to a girl destined for active life. Trades as well as professions are often hereditary. Mademoiselle Marie had just returned from a year's stay in an English business house, and already took her turn at the desk. In due time she would replace the young lady *caissière*, or clerk, and most probably marry a hotel-keeper.

These maternal colloquies brought out more than one French characteristic very forcibly. In forecasting the future of their children, parents leave the least possible to chance. A happy-go-lucky system is undoubtedly better suited to the Anglo-Saxon temperament. The more methodical French mind does not rebel against routine. Inherited prudence, an innate habit of reasoning, avert such conflicts as under the same circumstances would inevitably occur among ourselves.

After discussing sons and daughters, the two ladies would discuss their husbands, or rather take each other—and myself—into the happiest confidences. Madame C——, I knew well, owned a partner in every way worthy of her; the same good fortune had evidently fallen to Madame F——'s share. Hard were it to say which of the

two waxed the more enthusiastic on the topic. Sentimentality is foreign to the national character, but these matrons, mothers of youths and maidens, now became tearfully eloquent. Glad indeed I felt that the master of the *Lion Rouge* remained absent. The excellent man in person must have proved a disillusion—have fallen somewhat short of his wife's description!

Many other suggestive conversations I heard in that little parlour, but I must now relate by far the most interesting particular of this journey—the incident, in fact, which made it worth narrating.

Like Falstaff, I ever—when possible—take my ease at mine inn. Madame of the *Écu d'Or* had mentioned this little weakness to Madame of the *Lion Rouge*, and accordingly the best rooms on the first floor were assigned to us, the choicest wines served. During our several days' stay we enjoyed not only the cordiality of acquaintance-ship, but all the comfort and luxury the hotel could afford. What was my dismay, on applying for our bill, to learn that none was forthcoming! Quite useless for me to expostulate! Monsieur C—— and Monsieur F—— had transacted business together; I was Madame C——'s friend. Both of us had been received, and could only be received, on the footing of welcome guests and old acquaintances.

Argument after argument I tried in vain. There remained nothing for me to do but accept such generous hospitality in the spirit with which it was accorded. To have acted otherwise would have in the last degree outraged French susceptibilities. And afterwards, when asking my travelling companion how best to show my appreciation, her answer was characteristic.

"Send an English book, one of your own novels, to Mademoiselle Marie; on no account anything more costly, or it would look like payment in kind." Which advice I followed.

Nor was our journey in Dauphiné without evidence of this freemasonry. The *patronne* of the Écu d'Or seemed able to traverse France like the guest of Arab tribes, vicereally franked from place to place. As the sordid rather than the generous qualities of their compatriots are insisted upon by French novelists, such incidents are worth recording. On the whole, too, I am told on excellent authority that hotel-keepers in France, as a rule, do not make large fortunes. Their expenses are too great, and, excepting in large commercial centres and health resorts, their *clientèle* is not rich enough to admit of high charges. Only by dint of incessant attention to business and rigid economy can the bourgeois ideal be obtained—retirement, a suburban villa, and a garden.

I here add that, apart from national cleverness and capacity, I think two circumstances greatly account for the success of commercial houses under feminine management. The first is the admirable clearness with which arithmetic is taught and the prominence given to book-keeping in girls' schools in France. The second is concentration of purpose, a single aim. The matron has in view her children and grandchildren; the paid manageress her own independence. One and all have ever the future before them. They bend their undivided energies to the day's work, not for the sake of to-morrow's pleasure or relaxation, but of ultimate to-morrows, or aspirations inseparable from national character. Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice is not the dream of the French bourgeois; instead, the modest *existence assurée*, a life free from pecuniary anxiety, advancing years spent in solvent dignity and comfort.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE LYCÉE FÉNELON FOR GIRLS

A GENERATION ago the education of French girls was far behind that of England and Germany. I have no hesitation to-day in affirming its superiority to both Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic systems.

My convent-bred contemporaries in France, nay, younger women whose studies were but beginning when their own had long since ended, would treat their education as a subject of gentle irony.

"What did I learn at the convent, you ask me?" said one dear old friend to me some years since. "Absolutely nothing."

And another convent-bred friend, the other's junior by thirty years, by this time a wife and mother, informed me that she was sedulously applying herself to the study of history.

"Would you believe it?" she said, smiling, "in my convent French history stopped short at the Revolution, for us it ended with the *ancien régime*!"

The convent school was simply a school of manners. With M. Turveydrop, the teachers' business was solely to polish, polish, polish. A little French literature, a little music, perhaps a little drawing, were thrown into the bargain. If pupils quitted the place ignorant as they had come, they at least acquired habits of self-possession, a faultless deportment, and scrupulous attention to minutiae of dress, speech, and behaviour.



What must be regarded as a drawback to the lycée will be mentioned in its proper place.

When M. Hanotaux's work on contemporary France attains the colophon, we shall be in a position to appraise the Third Republic as an intellectual force. No sooner was French soil rid of the invader, the army re-organized, the war indemnity had been paid into German coffers, and on September 16, 1873, the last detachment of Prussian troops saluted the tricolour on the frontier near Verdun, than reforms began in earnest. The re-organization of the army, the raising of the French colonial empire to the second in the world, financial, municipal, and legislative reforms, were worthily crowned by the great Educational Acts, or Ferry laws, of 1881 and 1882. Popular education as projected by the Convention eighty years before now became a fact. Primary schools, lay, gratuitous, and obligatory, were opened in every commune throughout the country, and by the creation of the lycée for girls two rival camps were brought together; in the noble words of Gambetta—"French youths and maidens would henceforth be united by the intellect before being united by the heart." The reign of smatterings and polish, polish, polish was doomed.

The *lycée de filles* has no counterpart in England. A foundation of the State, a dependence of the University of France, a body subsidized alike by the Government and by municipalities, every member of the various staffs is a civil servant. With not a few Frenchmen, we are apt to rail at such instances of centralization. The results are what we have to consider, and the inspection and study of a lycée will eradicate many prejudices.

If a hard-and-fast rule of uniformity governs this administrative department as any other, if voluntarism is rigidly excluded, it must be borne in mind what voluntarism had cost the country before the Ferry laws. Until 1881 both men and women could teach provided



only with the so-called *lettre d'obédience*, or pastoral letter signed by the bishop—no certificate whatever of competence, merely a testimony to good conduct and submission to clerical discipline.

Under the stately ægis of the University of France, the French girl is protected from incapacity, favouritism, or misdirected patronage. The only title of admission to professional chair or to an inferior post is tried capacity. From the modestly paid *surveillante*, or supervisor of studies, to *madame la directrice*, or the lady principal, and certified lady teachers, the entire staff is responsible to the *vice-recteur* of the Académie de Paris. Here I may mention that there are sixteen *académies* in France, all affiliations of the university, the head of the university being the Minister of Public Instruction.

By the courteous permission of the *vice-recteur* of the Sorbonne, I was lately not only enabled to see over the magnificent Lycée Fénelon in Paris, but to be present during several lessons. In this vast congeries of buildings, annexe after annexe having been added to the ancient Hôtel de Rohan, five hundred and odd pupils from six to seventeen are accommodated with thirty *agrégées*—that is to say, ladies who have passed the examinations obligatory on professors teaching in a lycée, or *Faculté*, or school of art, science, or literature.

Unlike the lycée for boys, that for girls is exclusively a day school. Pupils living at a distance can have a mid-day meal and afternoon collation on the premises, but the State holds itself responsible to parents no farther. Omnibuses do not collect the children and take them home as is the case with convent schools. A new experience was it to see little girls of twelve, or even younger, deposit their pass ticket with the porter and run home unattended as in England.

I was assured that the habit is on the increase, and as many professional and middle-class families in Paris

keep no servant, great must be the relief of this innovation to over-worked mothers. Indeed, the excessive supervision of children in France has ever, of course, been a matter of money and circumstances.

An amiable young *surveillante*, or supervisor of studies and playground, etc., acted as my cicerone, explaining everything as we went along. Quitting the porter's lodge and large waiting-room, we entered the recreation ground, a fragment of the fine old garden in which contemporaries of Madame de Sévigné once disported themselves, now noisy with romping children. Class-rooms and refectories opened on to the gravelled spaces and shady walks, here and there lady professors taking a stroll between lesson and lesson.

Ascending a wide staircase, relic of former magnificence, with elaborate iron hand-rail, we zigzag through the labyrinthine congeries of buildings, now looking into one class-room, now into another. In some of these, fine mouldings and ceilings remind us that we are in what was once a splendid mansion of the Renaissance. The sight of each room made me long to be a schoolgirl again. Instead of receiving stones for bread and thistles for figs, the use of the globes, Mangnall's questions, and the like, a mere simulacrum of instruction, how delightful to be taught by the competent, to be made to realize our great thinker's axiom—knowledge is seeing!

In one class-room, or rather laboratory, a young lady professor was preparing her lesson on chemistry. Very business-like she looked in a long brown linen pinafore like a workman's blouse, as she moved to and fro, now fetching a retort, now some apparatus or substance for her demonstration. Great prominence is given to the study of elementary science in the lycée curriculum. Elsewhere we just glanced into a class-room where a second science mistress was lecturing on physics with practical illustrations. In yet a third room, a vase of

freshly gathered wild flowers betokened a forthcoming lesson on botany.

"Our pupils delight in their lessons on natural history," said my cicerone, as with natural pride she showed me the school museum, a small but comprehensive collection of stuffed animals, birds, and skeletons, scientifically classified, and constantly enlarged by friends and scholars.

One feature that more particularly interested me was a small room containing specimens of the pupils' work—delicately adjusted scales and weights, thermometers, and other mechanical appliances made by little girls unassisted. Here indeed was a proof positive that with the young lycéenne—knowledge is seeing. About twenty-five girls form a class, those attending the French lesson I was permitted to hear being from eleven to thirteen. Very much alive looked most of these little maidens, all wearing the obligatory black stuff pinafore fastened round the waist, and having long sleeves, many with their hair dressed *à la infanta* of Velasquez—that is to say, hanging loose, and knotted on one side with a ribbon; not a few still in socks! French girls, indeed, often go bare-legged and in socks till they are almost as tall as their mothers.

Dictation and grammatical analysis are subjects naturally less attractive than chemical experiments or a lesson on field flowers. More than once the lady professor was obliged to call some laggard to order; one, indeed, she sharply threatened with dismissal on account of inattention. But on the whole I should say the class was a very intelligent one, and two or three girls of eleven or twelve, called up for examination, showed a really remarkable mastery of syntax.

An admirable English lesson, given by a thoroughly capable French lady, was another interesting experience. Of the twenty-five pupils, their ages being the same as those of the former class, about a third, not more, showed lively interest in the study. Two or three, indeed, made a not

unsuccessful attempt to tell the story of Whittington and his cat in English! One bright little girl of twelve seemed ahead of all the rest. On the disadvantage of employing French professors of modern languages in Lycées, both for boys and girls, there at first sight would seem to be but one opinion. No amount of erudition and experience can surely here atone for the *sine quâ non* of fitness, namely, native idiom and accent, that vitality in language hardly less individual and racial a matter than physical idiosyncrasy.

The exclusion of foreign professors from State schools became law after the Franco-Prussian war, the measure being solely directed against Germans. At the present time I believe the measure is partly protective, in the interest of the excessive number of native teachers, and partly pedagogic, viz. in the interest of the scholars. And as a French friend writes on the subject—"It is my firm conviction that foreign professors should never be employed unless they can speak French fluently and *without accent*. Otherwise they are not respected by their pupils, and fail to exercise the desired authority."

Where, indeed, would these be found? Is it not for a similar reason that English professors of French and German are engaged for our own public schools? What seems at the onset a defect may therefore be a necessity.

The immense importance attached to the teaching of science more than compensates for any linguistic drawbacks. The French mind is naturally acquisitive and logical, instruction here so directly appeals to natural aptitude, that great things may be expected from the future. Already we find Frenchwomen coming to the fore in scientific discovery, law, medicine, and literature. The lycée fosters inclination for studies hitherto considered the province of the other sex. In the programme before me I find that students of the second division, *i.e.* girls from twelve to seventeen, are taught the following subjects, two or three being optional, and the complete course occupying



five years: *La morale*, moral science, general history, German or English (in departments bordering on Spain and Italy, Spanish and Italian replace these), domestic economy and hygiene, common law, natural history, physics, chemistry, geometry, and the elements of algebra. French language and literature, drawing, solfeggio, with gymnastics, needlework including cutting out, are added; also a dancing-class and practical lessons in cookery, these being an extra charge. In the preparatory class, *i.e.* for girls from six to twelve, the fees amount to 200 francs, just £8 a year, with an extra charge of £6 for pupils preparing their lessons under the supervision of a *répétitrice*, or under-teacher; in the second division the charges are from £10 to £12, the same sum as in the first being charged for what is called the *externat surveillé*.

Before quitting the Lycée Fénelon I sent in my card to *madame la directrice*, who received me most cordially, saying that, with the permission of M. le Vice-Recteur, she should at any time cordially welcome myself or friends. I mention this fact to show how the principle of authority is insisted upon in every administrative department of France.

"Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark! what discord follows! Each thing meets  
In mere oppugnancy."

In these words we have the key of that centralization so incomprehensible to ourselves, but which works so satisfactorily in France. The vast administrative machine moves apparently by itself, unhinged by outward events however disturbing.

A boarding-house at St. Mandé, within half an hour's distance from the lycée, was opened in 1903. Here bath-rooms, tennis court, croquet ground, and other modernities are offered on moderate terms.

As I was unable to visit this establishment, I will give some particulars of a boarding-house for girl-students at Toulouse visited some years since.



I arrived, unfortunately, during the long vacation, but a young lady teacher in residence kindly showed me over the house, or rather block of buildings, standing amid pleasant wooded grounds. Although we were as yet only midway through September, from attic to basement every corner was spick and span. In the vast dormitory of the upper school, I was, alas! reminded of the lycée for boys. Here were no less than thirty compartments or cubicles containing bed and toilet requisites, whilst at the upper end of the room, commanding a view of the entire length, was the bed of the *surveillante*, or under-mistress. Sleeping or waking, the lycéenne, like the lycéen, was here under perpetual supervision. In other respects the arrangements seemed excellent.

The lycée of Toulouse, like those of other provincial cities, is a dependance of the State, the department, and the municipality. Thus, whilst the programme of studies is drawn up by the M. le Recteur of the Toulouse Académie, the boarding-house just described is authorized by the town council, and the prospectus is signed by the mayor. Every detail, therefore, alike scholastic and economic, must receive the sanction of these respective authorities. How deep is the interest in secondary education the following citation will demonstrate: "At a sitting of the Conseil Municipal of December 29, 1887"—I quote from the prospectus of the boarding-house—"it was decided that a graduated reduction should be made for two, three, or four sisters, a fifth being received entirely free of charge." It would be interesting to learn how often this generous privilege has been enjoyed.

The charges both for school and boarding-house are about a third cheaper in the provinces than in Paris. The curriculum embraces the same subjects with occasional deviations. Thus, at Toulouse, on account of geographical position, Spanish may supplant German or English. Religious teaching in every lycée is left entirely to parents.



LA MAISON PATERNELLE



## CHAPTER XXIX

### LA MAISON PATERNELLE, OR REFORMATORY FOR YOUNG GENTLEMEN

WE are all familiar with the advertisements of schoolmasters and private tutors undertaking to control and amend idle or unruly lads. Incorrigible ne'er-do-wells of our own upper classes are summarily packed off to the colonies. Very different are French methods. The Code Civil, based on Roman law, places drastic measures within reach of French parents and guardians, and a brief account of the system pursued in dealing with rich prodigals over the water will not, perhaps, prove without interest. It is now many years since I visited the great agricultural and industrial reformatory, or *colonie*, as the place is euphemistically called, of Mettray, near Tours.

A little removed from the vast congeries of dwellings, workshops, and farm buildings stood a pretty Swiss *châlet*. This, our guide informed my fellow-traveller and myself, was the *Maison Paternelle*, another euphemism for what was in reality a refined sort of prison. Thither, we learned, incorrigibly idle or vicious lads of the better classes were sent for terms varying from one to six months, and kept in strict confinement.

We were obligingly allowed to inspect the house, which outside looked quite attractive, and within was what might be called a gilded cage, a genteel prison; once the key turned upon a captive, he was here as completely *embastillé*

as in the Bastille itself! The cells varied in size, furniture, aspect and decoration, carpets, curtains, a pretty view, and other luxuries adorning those of what, for want of an exact term, I will call first-class misdemeanants. But one feature characterized all. In the door of each cell was a pane of glass admitting of perpetual espial. Like Cain in Victor Hugo's fine poem, the prisoner was ever followed by an inquisitional eye.

The key and the peep-hole somewhat discounted our cicerone's glowing appreciation of the *Maison Paternelle* as a reforming medium. We refrained, however, from criticism till breakfasting with M. Demetz, the founder of Mettray, and the originator of the *Maison Paternelle*. We had reached the *colonie* soon after eight o'clock in the morning, and M. Demetz, who lived in the midst of his children, as he called the outcasts and prodigals, breakfasted at the early hour of ten. In a simple yet elegant home, a charming hostess in the person of the Countess, our host's daughter, and, unnecessary to add, a *déjeuner* of many courses, all perfectly cooked, awaited us.

One saw at a glance that M. Demetz was a born apostle of humanity; also that, although devoting himself to the humblest and least admirable of his kind, he had consorted with choicest spirits.

Past middle age, refined in feature, of exquisite urbanity, his face lighted up with rare enthusiasm when on the topic of his *Maison Paternelle*. Eloquent as he became, neither my friend, who was also a philanthropist and educationalist, nor myself were won over to the peephole and the key. We quitted Mettray smiling at what we deemed a good man's hobby.

We were wrong. The excellent M. Demetz has long since gone to his rest, my travelling companion, Madame Bodichon, the gifted foundress of Girton, has followed him to the grave. The *Maison Paternelle*, founded forty-eight years ago, not only exists, but has more than justified the



confidence of its projector. The tiny Swiss *châlet* is now replaced by a commodious house, fitted up with all modern requirements, and having accommodation for upwards of fifty inmates. What was formerly a tentative, a modest enterprise is now an important organization, managed by a board of directors, and having a staff of university professors. During the year 1900 no less than forty-six youths of wealthy parents were consigned to Mettray for shorter or longer periods by their parents and guardians. Methods have not changed with conditions. The system pursued by M. Demetz in dealing with idle or ill-conducted youths is still rigidly adhered to, its efficacy being borne out by results.

For an understanding of French institutions we must familiarize ourselves with the Code Civil. Here are the clauses by virtue of which parents can thus sequester their children—

“Art. 375. A father having very serious grounds for dissatisfaction concerning the conduct of his child, has at command the following means of correction.

“Art. 375. If the child is under sixteen, a father can have him put in confinement for a period not exceeding one month, and the President of the Tribunal of his arrondissement will, at his demand, deliver an order of arrest.

“Art. 377. From his sixteenth year until attaining his majority, a child may be imprisoned for a period not exceeding six months; his father must apply to the President of the Tribunal, who, after conferring with the Procureur of the Republic, will either deliver or refuse an order of arrest, and in the first case can shorten the period of detention.

“Art. 378. In neither case is there any judicial formality or written document necessary beyond that of the order of arrest, and a declaration of the reasons thereof. A father is obliged to pay all expenses of his son's food, or any other expense attached to his confinement.”

These conditions must be strictly complied with by parents sending their sons to the *Maison Paternelle*; but, as the President's order for incarceration, the only document necessitated by the proceedings, is burnt after each inmate's departure, no unpleasant reminder can be brought against him. His name does not figure on the criminal list. M. Demetz's idea was, therefore, an ingenious application of the above articles of the Code Civil, and the reports\* in my hands bear ample testimony to its success.

Before giving citations from these most curious reports, it is necessary to describe M. Demetz' methods.

The keynote of his system is based upon the reflective character of the French nation. "We reason more than we imagine," writes the first living philosopher of France,† "and what we imagine best is not the world of exteriors, but the inner world of sentiment, and, above all, of thought."

An unremitting appeal to the reasoning faculty, persuasion, kindness, and solitude—such are the influences brought to bear upon insubordination, indolence, and vicious habits.

From the moment of arrival to that of departure, an inmate of the *Maison Paternelle* sees no one but his attendant (the word *gardien* being substituted for that of *geôlier*), his professors, the chaplain, and the director. So complete is the isolation of each prisoner that two brothers, confined at the same time, have from first to last remained in ignorance of each other's presence. Inmates are known to the household staff by numbers only. The director alone knows each by name.

It was M. Demetz' opinion that a habit of reasoning is induced by solitude. Hence his insistence on this point.

\* "Maison Paternelle," *Compte-rendu Triennal*, 1898: Tours. Ibid., *Rapport Triennal*, 1901: Tours.

† "Nous raisonnons plus que nous n'imaginons, et ce que nous imaginons le mieux, ce n'est pas le monde extérieur c'est le monde interne des sentimens. et surtout des pensées" ("Psychologie du Peuple Français," par A. Fouillée).



LA MAISON PATERNELLE—INTERIOR



It must be borne in mind that the *Maison Paternelle* is essentially an educational establishment. Incurable idleness seems to be the principal cause of incarceration, and one interesting fact testifies to M. Demetz' perspicacity as a psychologist. "Whilst success has not always crowned our efforts in cases of moral perversity," writes the director in his last report, "from an intellectual point of view we have never failed." In other words, reflection has proved an apt monitor, where the head rather than the heart has been at fault. Of twenty-six students going up in 1892, 1893, and 1894, eighteen passed their examination of *baccalauréat*. A new-comer is straightway conducted to one of the smallest and barest cells. If he becomes violent or despairing, efforts are made to soothe and encourage him ; he is told that no constraint will be put upon his inclination, but that as soon as he wishes to set to work professors are at hand, who desire nothing better than to forward his progress. When reflection brings a better mind, his cell is changed for one more cheerful and comfortable, his improvement is furthered to the utmost by those about him, exceptionally good conduct and extra diligence are rewarded by excursions in the neighbourhood, and even visits to the historic chateaux of Touraine. In addition to the usual programme of studies, the youthful prisoner receives religious instruction and lessons in gymnastics, swimming, fencing, riding, and music. Every fortnight reports of health and progress are sent to parents and guardians.

The expenses of such an establishment are necessarily high, only professors of very special attainments being employed, and the number of pupils varying from year to year. An attendant, or *gardien*, moreover, is attached to each youth, this person's business being to accompany him in his walks, supervise his conduct generally, and serve his meals. Under the circumstances the following fees will not seem excessive : An entrance fee of 100 francs



(£4), 250 francs per month is paid for inmates preparing for elementary examinations, and 300 for those aspiring to the *baccalauréat*. A sum of 500 francs on account must be paid on entry of a pupil. English and German or any other foreign language, music, drawing, and dancing are extras; also books, stationery, and drawing-materials are charged for. No uniform is worn by inmates. Smoking is strictly forbidden, also the possession of money. Each inmate walks out for an hour a day, a payment of half a franc daily entitles him to a second hour's walk. This charge helps to defray the salary of an attendant.

On the eve of his discharge, the penitent prodigal is taken into the *cellule de réintégration*, i.e. the prison-like cell of refractory inmates; he there signs a solemn promise to refrain from evil or idle courses in the future. The *cellule de réintégration* serves as a reminder that, if a second time he is consigned to the *Maison Paternelle*, he must expect severer treatment than before.

As might naturally be expected the majority of youthful ne'er-do-wells in France, incorrigibly lazy, and the loafers are sons of widows. Children as a rule are mercilessly—the word is fit—spoiled in France, and especially is to be pitied the fatherless lad, the “lord of himself, that heritage of woe.” One mother thus wrote to the director of Mettray: “I see but too well, monsieur, that my own weakness has caused all the mischief, and that I deserve to occupy a cell as well as my son. I beseech you, come to my aid, help me to recover that authority I have allowed to be set at defiance.”

I will now give some brief extracts from the reports before named; also from a paper on the subject contributed to the *Journal des Débats*.\*

\* “Mettray: La Maison Paternelle,” par H. Alis. Tours: Imprimerie Mame.

Here is the letter of a fiery youth to his father on learning of the paternal intentions—

“MONSIEUR,

“It has just come to my knowledge that you intend to shut me up in a house of detention, in order that willy nilly I pursue my studies. Take note of this. Before Heaven I swear never to touch a pen for the purpose of work, never to open a book with similar intention, so long as I remain a prisoner. However hard to bear may prove incarceration, no matter to what indignities or punishments I am subjected, my mind is made up, my will is indomitable. I have already acquired quite enough for the fulfilment of an honourable career. I am, forsooth, to be imprisoned, dishonoured? We shall see the result.”

Six months later the young man thus addressed the director—

“MONSIEUR,

“On the eve of quitting the *Maison Paternelle*, I cannot help sending you a few lines expressive of my gratitude.

“It is owing to you, monsieur, and to my professors here, that I have now completed my studies, having learned more in six months under this roof than I should have done in two years elsewhere.

“Rest assured, monsieur, that I carry away with me the best possible remembrance of the *Maison Paternelle*; no apter name could be given to this house. Here I have learned—unfortunately, for the first time in my life—to reflect. I have been taught to see the serious side of life and my obligations as a social being. Thus I am deeply grateful for all the care bestowed upon me, and the interest taken in my progress by the professors. This is no adieu, merely an assurance of my esteem and gratitude.”

Another impetuous youth immediately after incarceration writes as follows to the director :—

“MONSIEUR LE DIRECTEUR,

“If I should say that I intend to work here and atone for the faults of which I am accused, I should tell a lie, and lying I detest.

“I will then tell you the truth, which is, that if I am not sent home within six days I will destroy myself. Know, monsieur, that I am capable of anything.”

The above is dated May 18, 1887. The following bears date August 13 of the same year :—

“MONSIEUR LE DIRECTEUR,

“Three months have now elapsed since I became an inmate of the *Maison Paternelle*, and I do not know in what terms to express my sense of indebtedness to you and of all the advantage I have gained by my stay.

“Forget, I entreat you, Monsieur le Directeur, my first letter. Rest assured that I bitterly regret having penned it. As for myself, I shall never forget what I owe you. You have made me a wholly different being. I am very sorry that you are away just as I am leaving ; but if I fail in my examination I promise to come back.”

The following, dated April 26, 1887, from another inmate, is more curious still :—

“MONSIEUR LE DIRECTEUR,

“Notwithstanding the proposals of my parents and their wish to see me go back to college, and having well considered the matter and reflected on my past career as a student, I have decided to pass the three months before going up for my examination at Mettray, the only place in which I have really made good use of my

time. I trust that no objection will be made to my return, and beg for the favour of an early reply.

"Pray give my grateful remembrances to my professors and the chaplain.

"Yours, etc."

I cannot refrain from a few more citations.

P. D. G. writes to the director in 1898, "Would you kindly send me some photographs of the *colonie* and the *Maison Paternelle* (three francs enclosed for the same), especially of the interior, in which last year, alas! I spent four months, quitting it, thank God, a reformed being. These photographs will remind me of a place once inwardly cursed by me, but now a source of self-congratulation, since to Mettray I owe my bettered self."

A grateful father thus expresses himself: "I am happy to inform you, Monsieur le Directeur, that after quitting the *Maison Paternelle* our René passed three months in Germany, returning with a considerable knowledge of German (*un bagage sérieux d'allemand*). He now attends the Lycée Jeanson, and is first of thirty-seven in the fourth class. Thus you see that I have every reason to be thankful for the pains taken with my son whilst in your hands."

Many "old boys" send donations towards improvements of the "*Paternelle*," as they affectionately call their former prison, and one showed his attachment to the place by visiting it in later years accompanied by his wife!

It would seem as if idleness and its corrective, the faculty of reflection, were in part hereditary. In any case the son of a whilom inmate was placed in the *Maison Paternelle* by his father.

No less interesting than the letters just cited, selections from a vast number, are the monographs or character sketches drawn up by M. Gilbert, Préfet des Études. A perusal of these carefully drawn-up human documents

suggest the inquiry, How far might the individualizing of criminals work out reform?

A distracted father begged the director to receive his son, a lad who had been expelled from college after college, and who had proved refractory alike to threats and entreaties.

Here is the youth's description from a psychological point of view: "He belonged to that class of pupils who delight in nothing so much as preventing others from work and upsetting order in a class-room. Intelligent, but idle and trifling, our new inmate, on arriving, decided—merely to annoy his father—on preparing for the mercantile instead of the classical *baccalauréat*. The mere notion that such a decision displeased his parents and professors was enough for him; one severe reprimand and a punishment relatively severe had no effect whatever. So long as he had his way he would be satisfied.

"But we must carefully analyze such natures, in order to deal with them efficaciously. Idleness and a propensity to trifling were this lad's chief faults. Before finally making up our minds that he should be humoured, we set him to work on preparations for the classical degree. At first all went well, his progress surprised even himself. On a sudden he declared his intention of seeking a fortune in the colonies. Of what good, therefore, to waste his time over Latin and Greek? Again he lapsed into idleness and inertia. The effect of a course of punishments was as that of a douche upon an enervated system. 'Such treatment was exactly what I needed,' he owned; and, strange to say—who would believe the fact without personal experience?—from that moment he worked strenuously, and became attached to his professors. In the end he made up his mind to present himself as a candidate for the *baccalauréat* of science and letters, and to the joy and infinite amazement of his parents passed the examination."

The young man—for by this time he might be so called



—thus wrote to the director: “For the first time in my life I am quite happy, because, for the first time also, I have made my parents happy. Since passing my examination I am treated so differently. I am almost afraid that my head will be thereby turned!”

Many other instances of successful treatment might be adduced, not only disinclination to work, but vicious habits, dissipation, addiction to bad company, gambling, and other vices having yielded to M. Demetz’ methods. I will now, however, say a few words about the resource of less wealthy parents, another and very different place of detention to which minors can be consigned by virtue of Articles 375, 376, 377, and 378 of the Code Civil. This is Citeaux, near Nuits, in the Côte d’Or, an agricultural and industrial penitentiary which, at the time of my visit some years ago, although a State establishment, was entirely controlled by priests. This, I believe, is now changed.

At Citeaux there is no separate organization for youths of the middle ranks. Twenty pounds a year only is the sum charged for board and lodging, and these paying inmates fare precisely the same as youthful vagrants or first offenders, but are not set to field work.

On the occasion of my visit, a hundred of the thousand inmates were middle-class boys with whom their parents could do nothing. And here, as at Mettray, a large percentage of these young good-for-nothings were sons of widows!

My driver, who was in the habit of conducting visitors to the *colonie*, as Citeaux is also called, told me that he had lately taken thither a widow lady with her son, a youth of seventeen; also another widowed mother with an unruly lad somewhat younger. The mother of the first-named incorrigible declared it her intention to keep him in the reformatory till he should become of age, unless he turned over a completely new leaf. My conductor further informed me that he was employed in the printing press, and looked miserable enough.

It is hardly to be expected that results at Citeaux would bear comparison with those of Mettray. In the former place a lad can have no individual treatment ; in the latter, he is in the hands of experienced specialists—in fact, he is a case, diagnosed and treated according to the most advanced theories of moral and mental science. The subject awakens much speculation.

## CHAPTER XXX

# THE FAMILY COUNCIL

### I. ITS ORIGIN AND HISTORY

**L**EGISTS cannot with any certitude determine the origin of that extra-legal tribunal in France, known as the *Conseil de Famille*, a domestic court of justice accessible alike to rich and poor and at nominal cost, occupying itself with questions the most momentous as well as the minutest, vigilantly guarding the interests of imbecile and orphan, outside the law, yet by the law rendered authoritative and binding. From the Middle Ages down to our own time, noble and *roturier*, wealthy merchant and small shopkeeper, have taken part in these conclaves, the exercise of such a function being regarded both as a civic duty and moral obligation. One object and one only is kept in view, namely, the protection of the weak. The law is stript of its cumbrous machinery, above all, deprived of its mercenary spirit. Not a loophole is left for underhand dealing or speculation. Simplicity itself, this system has been so nicely devised and framed that interested motive finds no place in it. Questions of property form the chief subject of inquiry and debate, yet so hedged round by precautions is the fortune of minor or incapacitated that it incurs little or no risk. And in no other institution is witnessed to the same extent the uncompromising nature of French economy. Justice here rendered is all but gratuitous.

According to the best authorities, this elaborate code of

domestic legislation is the development of mediæval or even earlier customs. Under the name of *l'avis de parents*, we find family councils alike in those provinces having their own legal systems, or *coutumes*, and those strictly adhering to Roman law. By little and little such usages were formalized, and so gradually becoming obligatory, in the fact, if not in the letter, were regarded as law. The extra-legal character of the family council is one of its most curious features.

Among the oldest documents referring to the subject is an edict of the fifteenth century, signed by René, father of Margaret of Anjou. The presiding judge is herein forbidden to appoint any guardianship till he has heard the testimony of three syndics, as well as of the child's relations, concerning the trustees proposed, their circumstances, position in life, and reputation. The syndics, be it remarked, were rural and municipal functionaries, replaced in 1789 by State-paid *juges de paix*. Intermediaries between the law and the people, the syndics were elected by vote, their term of office generally lasting a year.

The *coutumes* of Brittany and Normandy took especial care to define and regulate the family council. Thus an edict of 1673 ordains that six relations on the paternal, and as many on the maternal, side of any orphan or orphans, shall assist the judge in selecting trustees. A clause of the Breton Code enjoined that consultation should be held as to the education of the minors in question, "the profession, whether of arms, letters, or otherwise, for which they should be trained, the same to be decided according to their means and position."

In the Nivernais, the family council consisted of seven members ; in the Berri, of six ; in the Orléannais, of five. The Parliament of Bordeaux in 1700 fixed the number at six, as in the Berri.

These facts show the importance attached to the function before the Revolution. Up to that period it was an

elastic system based upon usage and tradition rather than law; the family council now underwent minute and elaborate revision at the hands of successive bodies of legists; finally embodied in the *Code Napoléon*, it has undergone little modification to our own day.

One of the most curious documents in this history is the rescript drawn up by Napoleon III. and his ministers at the Palace of St. Cloud, June, 1853. Following the statutes regulating the position of all members of the Napoleonic House, we have here the Imperial Family Council, as permanently and finally organized. The Emperor decided its constitution beforehand, once and for all. In other ranks of life such an assembly is called together when occasion requires.

"The *Conseil de Famille*," runs the *ordonnance*, "shall be presided over by the Emperor in person, or some representative of his choosing; its members will consist of a Prince of the Imperial family also chosen by the Emperor, of the Minister of State, the Minister of Justice, the Presidents of the Senate, the Legislative Body, and the Council of State, the first President of the Court of Cassation, of a Marshal of France or General of Division named by the Emperor."

As we proceed in this inquiry, we see how utterly at variance are autocratic principles with the real spirit of this domestic legislation. A body thus framed was a mere *vehmgericht*, not dealing certainly with life and death, but with personal liberty and fundamental rights of the individual. Thus this Imperial assembly could declare any member of the family incapable of managing his affairs—in other words, shut him up as a lunatic. All the powers vested in the *Conseil de Famille* were in this case without a single guarantee to the individual whose interests were concerned.

The origin of this truly patriarchal system is doubtless twofold. Although not directly traceable to Roman law,



the family council must be considered as partly an outgrowth of that source. In certain cases legal decisions concerning the property or education of minors in ancient Rome were guided or modified by the advice of near relations. But there was no obligation on the part of the magistrate; his decision was final.

On the other hand, the spirit of the domestic conclave is eminently Gallic. We find the same spirit animating French life at the present day. In France, "the family" does not only mean the group of father, mother, and children who gather round a common board. *La Famille* rather conveys the notion of a clan, the members of which are often settled within easy reach of each other, their entire lives spent, not merely as kinsfolk, but as neighbours. To realize this aspect of French society we must live in the country.

"The entire system under consideration," writes a French lawyer to me, "is based upon the bonds which unite, or ought to unite, the members of a family. It is a development, and not one of the least happy, of the patriarchal spirit. Its general tendency is excellent, and the rules framed for practical use are admirably drawn up and adjusted. Further, this legislation is in perfect harmony with our national character and our theories concerning children generally. We love children, perhaps, too well, since so often we spoil them by excess of tenderness." Regard for the welfare of children and of property underlies the constitution of the *Conseil de Famille*; the same motives, therefore, that actuate minds in the present day were uppermost centuries ago.

## II. ITS CONSTITUTION.

The family council may be described as the guardian of guardians. It is an assemblage of next-of-kin, or in default of these, of friends, presided over by a justice of the peace,

called together on behalf of orphans, of mentally incapacitated or incorrigible minors (see Art. 388 and 487 of the *Code Civil*). It is composed of six members exclusive of the *juge de paix*, namely, three next of kin on the paternal and three on the maternal side ; in default of these their place may be filled by friends. Natural children, according to the law have no relations ; in their case, friends or relations of the father acknowledging them, are eligible. No one who has forfeited civil rights by imprisonment can form part of the council ; members must be of age, and where two are equally fit, the elder is selected in preference to the younger.

Here follow some clauses that strongly bring out the Napoleonic distrust and contempt of women. From end to end of the *Code Civil* we discern this spirit. The woman, the wife, the mother, is relegated to the status of minor, imbecile, or criminal. Thus, no married woman can join a *Conseil de Famille* except the mother or grandmother of the ward whose interests are in question ; the same rules hold good with regard to guardianship.

Friends taking the place of kinsfolk are always named by the *juge de paix*, and cannot be accepted simply from the fact of offering themselves.

Unnaturalized foreigners, or French people who have accepted another nationality, are ineligible for the family tribunal. Nor can those take part in the deliberations who at any time have had a lawsuit with parents of the minor in question.

So much for the constitution of the family council. We will now proceed to its formalities. Here it is necessary to say a word about the *juge de paix*, whose name occupies a prominent place in this history. "French law," writes a legist in his commentary on the *Conseil de Famille*, "constitutes the *juge de paix* natural protector of the minor."

The family council is convoked by the *juge de paix* on his own account or at the request of friends or relations of

the minor ; summonses to attend may be sent out in two forms, either by a simple notice or by a *cédule* or obligatory request. In the former case, attendance is optional ; in the latter, refusal without valid excuse exposes the offender to a fine of fifty francs. But what is a valid excuse ? " Accident, sickness, absence," writes a commentator. In fact, any obstacle which the *juge de paix* holds insuperable. With him rests the responsibility of the fine, also the composition of the council, and here may be noted one of the extraordinary precautions taken. As the rural magistrate is supposed to know his neighbours, deliberations must take place within his especial jurisdiction. No minor's affairs can be settled except under presidency of the *juge de paix* of his or her district. Again, the sittings take place at the official residence, and in case of differences of opinion the *juge de paix* is entitled to the casting vote, another instance of his importance. Again, he must be no mean interpreter of the law. All kinds of knotty questions and legal niceties are brought out at these family conclaves.

Thus, upon certain occasions, the point has been raised—Can a *Conseil de Famille* be held on a Sunday or religious festival ? Lawyers have been much exercised upon this point, no trivial one to rural magistrates. In country places important events are almost invariably put off till the resting day, and, as a rule, the matter has been decided in the affirmative.

Here we light upon a curious piece of Revolutionary legislation. A commentator on the question of Sunday family councils cites the law of 17 Thermidor, An. VI., according to which all State offices and public bodies *vauquent les décadis jours de fêtes nationales*.

The sittings are considered private, and no publicity is given to the subjects under debate. Occasionally some member of the minor's family not taking part in the council may be present. The *greffier*, or clerk of the *juge de paix*, is also in attendance, but no one else.

The non-responsibility of members summoned to deliberate is strictly recognized by law ; for instance, if a properly constituted family council has decided upon investments which ultimately prove disastrous, neither individually nor collectively are they held responsible. If, however, on the other hand, connivance with intention to defraud is proved, they are proceeded against in the ordinary way.

The legal expenses attendant upon this domestic legislation are restricted to the minimum. Minutes are registered by the *juge de paix* at a cost of from one to ten or fifteen francs ; certain important transactions require a fee of fifty francs.

There remains one more point to be noted under the head of constitution of a *Conseil de Famille*. I allude to what in French legal phraseology is called "*homologation*," in other words, the formal legalization of any decision arrived at by this body. Certain verdicts require this to be rendered valid and binding, others do not. Among the first are those relating to the sale or transference of a minor's estate, to the dismissal of a minor's guardian, to the dowry and marriage contract of son or daughter of any one deprived of civil rights. The nomination of trustees, the refusal or acceptance of legacies, the details of guardianship generally, *i.e.* education, bringing up of wards, and many other measures, do not require this process of *homologation* ; they are valid and binding without formal legalization.

### III. ITS FUNCTIONS.

The family council, in its care of the fatherless child, is anticipatory. Thus we find a special provision of the code. The *Code Civil* makes special provision for a man's posthumous offspring. No sooner does he die leaving a widow *enceinte* than it is her duty to summon a family council for the purpose of choosing what in legal phraseology is called



a *curateur à l'enfant à naître*, or a *curateur au ventre*. Duly elected, this guardian is authorized to undertake the entire management of her late husband's property, rendering a full account of his stewardship on the birth of the child. This trusteeship of children as yet unborn awakens mixed feelings. Without doubt cases in which the head of a family has left no directions of the kind, may necessitate such precautions. At the same time do we not trace clearly here the subordination of women as derived from Roman law? "We must acknowledge," writes a learned commentator,\* "that the *curateur à l'enfant à naître* is named solely in the interest of a man's heirs, a result, as pointed out elsewhere, due to an adhesion to Roman law; Article 393 has crept into our code probably without due weighing of consequences on the part of the legislator." The *curateur's* duty is also to verify the condition of the wife *dans la mesure des convenances*, also the birth of a legitimate child. When we reflect that the legal heirs of a defunct person are his next of kin, we can easily understand the offensiveness of this law to an honourable, delicate-minded woman; at the same time we are bound to admit that such precautionary measures would in our own country prevent the scandal of a "Baby claimant." French law, sometimes for good, certainly sometimes for evil, interferes with private life much more than in England.

When we come to the subject of minors and orphans, we appreciate the enormous power vested in the family council. The appointment of trustees and guardians, when not made by parents, rests entirely with this assemblage; † also in its hands is a power requiring more delicate handling still, namely, the withdrawal of paternal authority. Here

\* M. J.-L. Jay, "Conseils de Famille."

† When the last surviving parent has failed to appoint trustees and guardians, the duty devolves upon paternal or maternal grandfathers; grandmothers are ineligible. This is the *Tutelle légale*, the *Tutelle dative* being that appointed by the family council.



we meet with points recalling the Society for the Protection of Children, founded some years ago by the Rev. Benjamin Waugh. As will be seen, however, the family council holds entirely aloof from criminal cases, concerning itself with civil affairs only, first and foremost with the disposition of property. "From the earliest time," writes a learned commentator, "minors have been regarded (by French law) as privileged beings, placed under the protection of society generally."

French legists have doubtless done their best for the foundling, the illegitimate, the disowned. Especially within recent times has the lot of these waifs and strays been ameliorated by the law. Terrible was their condition formerly as revealed in early records, also in statutes and legal commentaries. During the Middle Ages, when, according to a French writer, "Roman law fully exercised its disastrous influence, foundlings were deposited at church doors, sex and age of each child were inscribed in a book called the 'Matricule' (Lat. *matricula*), they were reared in convent or nunnery, and, when sufficiently grown, *sold by auction*. These wretched little beings were chiefly offered for sale in the large cities and purchased by the poor for a mere trifle, these often disfiguring or even maiming their chattels so as to excite public compassion. It was not till 1640 that St. Vincent de Paul founded the first foundling hospital in France. A century before, the *ordonnance* of Moulins had obliged the communes of that jurisdiction to maintain all abandoned children found within their limits. In 1599, the Parliament of Paris had moved in the same direction, ordaining that the charge of foundlings should fall upon the parishes to which they belonged."

It is the honour of the Republic to have established orphanages in all the cities and larger towns. By a law, moreover, of 15 Pluviose, An. XIII., a kind of family council was appointed for the children of the State. The *conseil de tutelle* discharged the functions of a *conseil de*

*famille*. This trusteeship lasts till the majority or marriage of the individual.

We now come to a class only a degree less unfortunate. I allude to the acknowledged children of irregular connections, the illegitimate. French law, as we know, is very merciful to parents who will atone for such lapses. Marriage, no matter the age of the offspring, legitimizes. A natural child is thereby put on precisely the same footing as if born in wedlock.

In all other cases the law stands by him, in so far as possible, protecting and promoting his interests. "If there is a human being in the world requiring legal guardianship," writes a commentator before mentioned, "it is without doubt the illegitimate, friendless from the cradle, having no relations, none to look to but him to whom he owes his birth. The care and maintenance of natural children is the duty, the obligation of every father. If no provision were made by law to this effect, such provision would have to be made." The *Code Civil* has, in so far as possible, regulated the position of natural children. A family council, however, summoned on their behalf cannot be composed in the ordinary way, the illegitimate having neither kith nor kin. The relations of the father acknowledging them, friends of both father and mother are accepted, and the legal guardianship is framed on the same principles as that of children lawfully begotten. Volumes have been written on this subject, legists differing as to the right of a natural child to what is called legal or confessed guardianship, *tutelle légale*, i.e. paternal, or *tutelle dative*, i.e. appointed by the family council. When difficulties arise, the matter is settled by the *Cour de Cassation*.

After minors, orphans, and illegitimates come the *interdis*, or individuals pronounced incapable of managing their affairs. These are imbeciles, maniacs, and persons condemned for criminal offences. Here the *Code Napoléon* now known as the *Code Civil*, amended the sterner Roman

clause, according to which a deaf mute was placed on a level with idiots. A dispute on this question having arisen at Lyons in 1812, the *Cour de Cassation* decided that a deaf mute giving evidence of intelligence, although unable to read and write, must be pronounced *compos mentis*.

In the case of insanity, a family council is summoned as a preliminary measure, a judicial sentence being required before depriving the individual in question of his liberty. An instance of the kind came some time ago under my own notice. The *conseil de famille* had agreed as to the necessity of seclusion, the tribunal decided otherwise. It will thus be seen that, except in case of a veritable conspiracy of relations, friends, and *juge de paix*, the extensive powers of this domestic court are hemmed round with guarantees. Again, we must bear in mind a fact constantly insisted upon by French legists, namely, that we are here dealing with a *conseil d'avis*, a consultation acknowledged by the law and responsible to the law, not with legislation itself.

A final class coming under the wardship of the family council consists of the incorrigible and the spendthrift—in French phraseology *le prodigue*, a subject treated in the foregoing chapter.

Any guardian, having grave matter for complaint against his ward, is empowered to summon a family council in order to pass the disciplinary measure called *la réclusion*, in other words, a term of modified imprisonment (*Code Civil*, Art. 468, *De la puissance paternelle*).

Without doubt the most important function of the family council is the choice of guardians, the *tutelle dative* as opposed to the *tutelle légale*, the former being accorded by this body, the latter being the natural guardianship of parents. The *tutelle légale* is obligatory, no father being at liberty to reject the duty. So also is the *tutelle dative*; no individual selected by a family council as guardian and being related to the family of the minor is at liberty

to refuse the charge ; it is as much incumbent upon any French citizen as military service or the payment of taxes. This is a most important point to note.

A few exemptions are specified in the code. Thus, the father of five legitimate children is exempt, also persons having attained the age of sixty-five, or being able to prove incompetency from illness. The following also may refuse : ministers and members of the legislative body, admirals, generals, and officers in active service, *préfets* and other public functionaries at a distance from the minor's home.

The *conseil de famille* having named a guardian, also names a *tuteur subrogé*, or surrogate, whose office is not in any way to interfere with the trustee, but to examine accounts and watch over the interests in question.

On the subject of tutorial sphere and duty the law is explicit to minuteness. Generally speaking, he is expected to act as a father towards his own child, having care of his ward's moral and intellectual education, protecting his or her interests, in fact, filling the place of a second father. Whilst entrusted with the management of affairs as a whole, certain transactions lie outside his control. Thus he is not at liberty to accept a legacy for his ward without the consent of the *conseil de famille*. This precautionary measure requires explanation. Sometimes the reversion of property may mean very heavy legal expenses, an enjoyment of the same being a prospect too remote to be counted upon. An instance of this has come under my own observation. A boy, son of French friends of mine, was left the reversion of an estate, the life interest being bequeathed to another. His parents, somewhat reluctantly accepted the charge, paying a little fortune in legal fees and duties for property most likely to come to a grandson. No family council would have authorized such a course in the case of a minor.

Again, the guardian cannot purchase any part of his



ward's estate or belongings. Nor can he re-invest stocks and shares without authorization. On the expiry of his charge, that is to say, on the marriage or coming of age of the minor, the property in trust has to be surrendered intact, all deficits made up from his own.

On this subject a French lawyer wrote to me, "It is extremely rare that any ward has occasion to complain of his or her guardian. During a legal experience of twenty-five years, no serious matters of the kind have come under my notice. Nevertheless, my practice lay in a part of France where folks are very fond of going to law. It will occasionally happen that some elderly trustee persuades his young ward to marry him ; these gentlemen have not perhaps been over-pleased with their success in the long run. They are too much of a laughing stock." Legal coming of age, *l'émancipation*, brings the guardian's task to a close. According to French law there are two kinds of emancipation, the formal and the tacit ; these matters, however, lie beyond the scope of my paper.

The functions of the family council are fully set forth in the *Code Civil* ; to understand its scope and spirit we must study the commentators. "Le Répertoire de jurisprudence général," compiled by Victor and Armand Dalloz, was first published in 1836, but remains the standard work of reference on legal questions. A handy and admirable digest of the *conseil de famille* is to be found in the "Traité," by J.-L. Jay (Bureau des Annales des *Juges de Paix*, Paris, 1854). Unfortunately, this book is out of print, and only to be picked up on the quays or at bookstalls.

In conclusion, I cite the words of a friend before quoted, an experienced French lawyer, no learned commentator, but a hard-working practitioner. "The excellence of such a system," he wrote, "is proved by one fact, namely, the very small number of lawsuits arising therefrom. Very rarely it happens that a ward has any reason to complain of his trustees."



We must bear in mind that inadmissibility to the charge of trusteeship is a disgrace, almost on a footing with the forfeiture of civil rights. Hence the high character of French trustees generally.

The family council is not often introduced into novels, an omission difficult to understand.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### CHARACTERISTICS

ON this subject, the nicest and thorniest a foreigner can handle, I will confine myself to personal experience, speaking of our neighbours as I have found them.

A contemporary French philosopher, M. Fouillée, has analyzed his country-people in a series of psychological and physiological studies, all profoundly interesting, but not appealing to the general reader. National traits and idiosyncrasy as evidenced in daily life are more readily grasped than scientific generalizations, and more profitably illustrate national character for those obliged to content themselves with vicarious acquaintance.

I smile whenever my eyes light upon such stereotyped expressions as "our volatile neighbours," "the light-minded Gaul," "the pleasure-loving French," and so on. The French nation is, on the contrary, the most serious in the world, and Candide's query, "Est ce qu'on rit toujours à Paris?" "(Is Paris always laughing?)" might be answered thus, "When she does not weep," which is often.

How little the great democracy at our doors is understood existing prejudices testify; two or three generations ago every lettered and travelled Englishman could write of French people in language on a par with that of Rochefort and Drumont when harrying the Jews or Protestants. Let the reader, for instance, turn to the eleventh chapter of Thomas Love Peacock's brilliant novelette, "Nightmare

Abbey," published in 1818, for a verification of this statement. Doubtless, after relieving his feelings by this outburst of truly disgusting invective, the author felt that he had acquitted himself of a patriotic duty, and, if he did not implicitly believe his appraisal of French character, regarded it as a felicitous guess. It was left for our great poets of that epoch, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, to champion the France of Revolution ; from their days to our own, English writers on French people and French affairs have mostly been blind leaders of the blind, intensifying rather than eradicating insular prejudice. It must be confessed that our neighbours have only themselves to blame for much of this misconception. Frenchmen are often whimsically, even libellously self-depreciative. They love to wear a fictitious heart upon their sleeve, to dandle a mannikin in the eyes of naïve beholders. Here Anglo-Saxon and Gaul conspicuously differ.

An Englishman is apt to follow Hamlet's counsel and affect a virtue though he has it not. A Frenchman vaunts of foibles quite foreign to his nature.

The following story is apposite.

One day in my presence, a matron, wife of a Dijon notary, was praising her friend's son.

"Your Jules is charming," she said—"so amiable, so diligent, and so steady!"

"Humph!" replied the stripling's mamma ; "he would not be pleased to hear himself called steady," the country-bred youth in question, whom I knew well, being as little likely to become a gay Lothario as was the younger Diafoirus.

Novelists have here sinned greatly, but on that point I dwell further on.

Another strongly marked quality is reserve, reminding one of a Japanese toy in the shape of a box. Remove the lid and you find a second, the second contains a third, the third a fourth, and so on. It is a very long time

before you get at the kernel. Nor is such reserve exercised towards foreigners only. Some time since a French friend was dining with me at a Paris hotel chiefly frequented by rich Chicagans. After dinner the company adjourned into the hall, and there over tea or coffee broke up into little groups. Quite evidently most of these tourists were chance-made acquaintances, encountered, perhaps, on their liner or in these Parisian quarters. All were now fraternizing with the utmost cordiality. "How pleasant is this experience!" observed my companion, himself in former days a considerable traveller; "and how unlike the behaviour of my own country people when thrown together on foreign soil!"

It is only among the much travelled and cosmopolitan that letters introductory lead to any but the most formal hospitality or superficial acquaintance in France. The late Mr. Hamerton, who married a French wife, and spent thirty-five years in his adopted country, was astounded at the prevailing unsociableness in country places. The home so agreeably described in "Round my house" was situated within a walk of Autun, in Burgundy. Mr. Hamerton had plenty of neighbours, that is to say, families living, as is the case here, a few miles off, all being in easy circumstances and possessing vehicles. Folks, he told me, saw next to nothing of each other. Intercourse began and ended with ceremonious calls made at lengthy intervals. In England, under such circumstances, every one would know every one. The social ball would be kept rolling, money would circulate at a brisk pace, from the end of July till November.

This observation brings me to the hallmark of French descent, the indubitable proof of Gallic ancestry. Such stay-at-home, circumscribed ways arise partly from habits of inveterate, inrooted economy. "The Anglo-Saxon," writes M. E. Demolins, "is the most perfect organism that exists alike for the purpose of gaining and spending

money. In France," he adds, "there is less inclination to gain money, and for the most part no inclination whatever to spend it."

Such parsimony, whilst it accounts for the absence of perpetual and salutary social intercourse, give and take familiar to ourselves, has its origin in the purest and loftiest springs of human action. Thrift degenerates into avarice, yet what was thrift in the beginning but forethought, the long, long look towards years to come ; not only care for one's self, but for one's offspring—in other words, for humanity? "Every Frenchman," writes M. Hanotaux, in the new volume of his monumental work, "works for the future, accumulates for posterity, restricting his wants and his enjoyment in the interest of after generations."\* As I have already shown, even the peasants of the *ancien régime*, despite *corvée* and *gabelle*, despite fiscal and seigneurial oppression, contrived to lay the foundation of family fortunes.

Another hallmark of French character is delicacy, the horror of wounding the susceptibilities, of being deemed obtuse, unamiable, or impolite.

Here is an illustration.

Some years ago, when staying at Lons-le-Saulnier (Jura), my host accompanied me to lunch with friends living an hour and a half off by road and rail, their carriage meeting us at the little country station. We were to leave at four o'clock, no other train being available till late in the evening.

The moment for departure drew near, but my friend, deep in a political discussion, had apparently become unmindful of the arrangement ; our hostess, I noticed, did just glance at the clock once or twice, that was all. At the eleventh hour I ventured to take the initiative ; the carriage was brought round, the horse put to a trot, and we caught the train by half a minute. As I knew that the later hour

\* "La France contemporaine," vol. ii.



would have inconvenienced both hosts and guests, and as I had noticed madame's furtive glances at the timepiece, I asked my companion why we had not been dispatched without haste and flurry. He looked at me with no little surprise. "Tell a visitor it is time for him to go? The thing is impossible!"

Certainly the English plan of speeding the parting guest has much to recommend it, but the story is highly suggestive. It helps us to understand how Voltaire allowed himself, as he put it, to become the "innkeeper of Europe." Mr. Hamerton preferred John Bull's blunt outspokenness. His home near Autun becoming too much intruded upon by English and American visitors, he affixed the following notice to his front door: "Visitors at the Pré Charmoy who have not received an invitation for the night are requested to leave at six o'clock." Imagine the shocked surprise of French callers able to decipher the inscription!

The horror of appearing uncourteous is evinced in many ways.

Thus, no matter how visible or grotesque may be English blunders in French, our neighbours never permit themselves so much as a smile in your presence; instead they will quietly and even apologetically put the speaker right. There are natures of finer or coarser calibre in France as elsewhere, but a dominant note of national character is this delicacy. Many formulas of current speech, indeed, bring out the idiosyncrasy. Harsh terms and disagreeable expletives are avoided, ill-sounding forms of expression toned down. When the great statesman Thiers had breathed his last, the tidings were thus conveyed to the widow: "Madame, votre illustre mari a veçu" ("Your illustrious husband once lived"). To have blurted out, "Your husband is dead," would seem in French ears an aggravation of the shock.

Again, how charming and characteristic is that oxymoron, *une jolie laide* ("a plain beauty"), in other words, a

woman whose vivacity and expressiveness atone for Nature's unkindness in other respects.

Another euphemism is the expression, "*il laisse à désirer*" ("it leaves something to be desired").

A tutor, for instance, reporting progress of an unsatisfactory pupil, will not distress his parents by saying, "Your son's conduct is bad," or "Your son is not doing well." He qualifies the unpleasant information by writing word that both behaviour and application to studies leave something, or maybe much, to be desired.

These things are not wholly bagatelles, but it is also in grave matters that this national trait is conspicuous.

Leisureliness is another inrooted French attribute. The prevailing dislike of hurry, the margin of time allowed alike for trivial as well as weighty transactions, are refreshingly opposed to American standards.

The proverb "Time is money" has not as yet found acceptance in the most intellectual and highly polished country of Europe. France, like Hamlet, has still her breathing hour of the day; compared to the Republic across the Atlantic, is still "a pleasing land of drowsy-head." In a charming volume, Madame Bentzon recounts how an American acquaintance once visited her in the Seine and Marne, and his astoundment at the spectacle before him. The antiquated farming methods still in vogue, oxen drawing old-fashioned wooden ploughs, husbandmen cutting their tiny patches of corn, housewives minding their cows afield, transported him to Biblical scenes. He could hardly realize that he was in Europe, and in such a quarter of Europe.

It is not only country folks who must ever have a liberal allowance of time. Equally somnolent must appear the commercial world in Chicagan eyes.

"At Bradford men never walk, they are always running," said a French youth to me after some months' sojourn in a business house of that city.

A Luton straw-hat manufacturer of my acquaintance thus commented on the same characteristic—

“The French are excellent customers, but are very slow in making up their minds. The French buyer will turn over a hat or a bonnet a dozen times, go away without giving an order, will look in next day, very likely the day after that, before coming to a decision. But French commercial honour stands at high-water mark ; thus, dilatory as are French buyers, none receive a warmer welcome.”

English travellers are sometimes exasperated by this leisureliness in other quarters. In September of last year I left Paris for Dover by the excellent 9.45 forenoon express. The weather had just broken up in Switzerland, and late arrivors at the Gare du Nord found the greatest difficulty in procuring a seat. A young Englishman in this plight who addressed himself to an official received the following reply : “ You should be here an hour before the train starts ” ! Regarded from a wholly opposite point of view, this deliberate, unhasting temperament is indeed enviable. How much may not the excellence of French manufactures, handicrafts, and produce be thereby accounted for ?

Nor is Goethe's maxim, “ Ohne Hast, ohne Rast ” (“ without haste, without rest ”), non-existent in other fields. Art, literature, legislation, have been similarly influenced, whilst leisureliness, an instinctive repugnance to hurry and bustle, a philosophic love of repose, constitute a paramount charm of French home life. Under our neighbours' roof we are not too rudely reminded that “ Time and tide wait for no man,” much less that “ Time is money.” No wonder that the prematurely old men of whom Mr. Foster Fraser speaks in his American sketches, white-haired, care-lined veterans of thirty, are unknown in France. There at least folks allow time to overtake them ; they do not advance post haste to meet it.

The least sentimental people on the face of the earth,

our neighbours have a matchless genius for friendship. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," might have been written by Montaigne rather than by Jesus, the son of Sirach. We often hear on elderly lips the endearing "thee" and "thou" of the Quaker, old lycéens, grandmothers whose acquaintance dated from the first communion, maintaining brotherly, sisterly relations throughout life. The bachelor, the functionary, the military man compelled to dine at a restaurant, must ever have a *commensal*, or table companion; in this respect they resemble Kant. The great philosopher's means in later life permitting such hospitality, he ever had three or four covers laid for daily "Tischgenossen." Little wonder that the sociable Gaul abhors a solitary meal.

It was Montesquieu's opinion that when an Englishman wanted thoroughly to enjoy his newspaper, he climbed on to a housetop for the sake of privacy! True it is that whilst we have the verb "to enjoy one's self," the French have another and more amiable reflective, *jouir de quelqu'un*\* ("to enjoy another's society"). "Je vais jouir de vous" ("I come to enjoy you"), said a charming lady to me one evening in a country house near Nancy.

The most reserved, yet the most sociable being in the world, the most accomplished in the art of friendship, neither in friendship nor in love is a Frenchman in the least given to sentimentality. The only subjects on which he ever sentimentalizes are *patrie*, *drapeau*, *République*—motherland, tricolour, Republic. Personalities evoke the most profound, unalterable attachments, the most fervid admiration, never gushing outbursts. No wonder that modern German novels are so little appreciated in France. Dickens, for whom our neighbours have a positive veneration, is often a sentimentalist, but in his case the single defect is counterbalanced by a thousand virtues. I will

\* "Jouir de quelqu'un, avoir le temps, la liberté de conférer avec lui, d'en tirer quelque service, quelque plaisir" (Littré).



now turn to a French trait that equally puzzles insular observers.

Why, in a pre-eminently intellectual and fastidious people, do we find an undisguised, immoderate addiction to *le gros rire*, an insatiable appetite for the grotesquely laughable? How little sort Parisian comic papers, popular Parisian plays, and M. Rochefort's scurrilous pasquinades with the loftier side of French character!

In the first place, we must remember that no wave of Puritanism has at any time swept over the land of Rabelais. The joyousness which Rabelais inculcated as a duty, the rollicking spirits in his own case masking stern philosophic truths, have never received similar check. *Le gros rire*, the hearty laugh, still remains the national refuge from care and ennui; as in former days, it oftentimes diverted the mind from impending tortures and violent death. Alike martyrs and criminals have made merry in awful moments. The Marquise de Brinvilliers jested over the preparations for her long-drawn-out torments, the gallant young de la Barre uttered a sally on the eve of a doom no less horrible, Danton improvised puns as he was jolted towards the guillotine.

Every Frenchman has a touch of Rabelais, of Voltaire, in his composition.

I once asked an old friend of eclectic tastes and high culture how it was that the buffooneries and scurrilities of the *Intransigeant* could possibly interest him. "Ma foi, je ne sais pas, mais ça me fait rire" ("On my word I don't know, but the paper makes me laugh"), was his reply.

Laughter—the copious exercise of the risible faculties—is a constitutional, a physical need of the Gallic temperament. Hence the enormous popularity enjoyed two generations ago by Paul de Kock. Search the little library of this writer's fiction through and you will find no scintilla of wit, hardly a *bon-mot*. But in one respect he was a true literary descendant of Rabelais. His *Gauloiseries*, broad



drolleries, could ever raise a laugh. Few people read poor Paul de Kock nowadays. *Le rire* in Anatole France has found a subtler, more piquant, more philosophic exponent, but anything and everything is forgiven that author, actor, musician, or artist who can evoke spontaneous mirth.

How came it about that "L'Allegro" was written by an Anglo-Saxon and a Puritan, and not by a Frenchman? The matter must remain an eternal mystery.

On this subject there remains one point to be dealt with. An English friend, who had been shocked by some coarse illustrated papers purchased at a Paris kiosk, lately put the following question to me: How were such publications compatible with the purity of French home life? My answer was simple—boys and girls in France do not enjoy the liberty, or rather the licence, permitted among ourselves. When journeying from Hastings to Folkestone by train some years since with a French friend, two boys of ten to twelve sitting opposite had their heads deep in newspapers. The French mother was greatly shocked. Children of that age, she said, were never permitted in France to purchase or read newspapers. And I can speak from experience, that where young people are present, the Rabelaisian joke, or *double entendre*, is banished from the family board.

If the critical faculty is sometimes at fault where the risible is concerned, it is nevertheless an equally striking characteristic. French literary criticism has ever stood at high-water mark, and to criticize, with our neighbours, takes the place of to enjoy.

Listen to the work-a-day world at the Louvre or the Luxembourg on a Sunday afternoon. Instead of the interjectional "How pretty!" "How beautiful!" "How life-like!" of a similar audience at the Royal Academy or National Gallery on Bank Holiday, you will overhear cautious, painstaking, deliberately uttered criticism—the views of men and women who are there not merely for irreflective

enjoyment, the whiling away of an idle hour, but for the exercise of the critical faculty, the ripening of artistic taste, the comparing achievements with a preconceived ideal.

Still more marked is, of course, this habit of mind among the highly cultivated. A French friend, for instance, accompanies you to a museum, picture-gallery, or play. You soon discover that you have at hand, not a cicerone, but a lynx-eyed critic, disputable or unobvious points being raised every moment, the reasoning, questioning instinct perpetually alert. To less subtle minds such a mood will appear hypercritical, but herein without doubt lies the secret of French supremacy in art and letters, and that better word I will call the finish of manufactures and handicrafts. And what is the perfect dress of a Frenchwoman but an evolution of the critical spirit, and to place herself above criticism in this respect is often immensely difficult. Thus the wife of an officer in garrison or of a lycéen professor, no matter the narrowness of resources, must on no account make calls except in an irreproachable toilette and in style up to date. The young wife of an artillery captain with whom I once spent some time at Clermont-Ferrand, used to keep one complete costume for visits of ceremony, immediately on her return doffing not only bonnet and gown, but slip, shoes, and even fancy stockings! Every article must retain its comparative freshness and fashionableness till replaced. Critical herself, a Frenchwoman naturally guards against criticism in others.

The French mind is pre-eminently logical. "We reason more than we imagine," writes M. Fouillée, "and what we imagine the best is not the exterior world, but the inner world of sentiments and thoughts." Further on this psychologist adds, "The passion for reasoning often leads to forgetfulness of observation" ("Psychologie du peuple Française"). This love of system, this tendency to generalize at the expense of experience, is strikingly

evidenced in M. Boutmy's recent work on the English people. Nothing is more characteristic of the two nations than the methods respectively pursued by the above-named writer and the late Mr. Hamerton. In his admirably judicial work, "French and English," our countryman jots down the experiences of thirty-five years' residence in France, illustrating each proposition by telling anecdotes and traits of character that have come immediately under his own observation. M. Boutmy enters upon his task as a mathematician working out a problem. From a few principles, with great lucidity, he traces the evolution of the English mind as shown in matters intellectual, social, and material. Mr. Hamerton spoke of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen as he found them, and is consequently never at fault. M. Boutmy cannot for a moment relinquish his theories; but theories, however sound, will not always accommodate themselves to actualities.

Here is an instance. M. Boutmy describes the English people as inaccessible to pity. But what are the facts? To the honour of England, be it said, here was promulgated the first law rendering punishable inhumanity to animals.\* Tardily enough, the French Government so far followed our initiative as to pass the *Loi Gramont*, an Act, unfortunately, too often a dead letter.

The entire work shows the same subordination of experience to system, observation to theory.

M. Boutmy and M. G. Amédée Thierry, who also speaks of the English as a people inaccessible to pity (*Le complot des Libelles*), should note the impressions of the French medical men recently visiting our shores. To the immense astonishment of these gentlemen, they discovered that all

\* "The English," writes Mr. Rambaud, "had the honour of preceding every other nation in humane treatment of the insane. Whilst in Paris (until the Revolution) insane people were herded with criminals, loaded with chains, cruelly beaten and shut up in frightful cells, England founded so far back as 1547 the asylum of Bedlam, and in 1751 St. Luke's, for the mentally afflicted" ("Histoire de la civilisation Française," vol. iii.: 1900).

our magnificent hospitals are entirely supported by private contributions, and that outdoor patients are not only examined gratuitously, but supplied with medicaments free of charge.

And as I write these lines I see in a morning paper the following testimony to "a people inaccessible to pity." The correspondent describes a meeting held in Paris on behalf of the Sunday rest movement, and he adds, "It is pleasant to note how strongly and sympathetically this social reform is advocated by the French press, and how the example of England is admired and recommended."

Such appreciation is not common. If our neighbours have hitherto habitually been misrepresented here, still more have English folks been misjudged on the other side of La Manche.

The French intellect is above all things scientific. It must never be forgotten that the very first great scientific expeditions set on foot in the world were due to French initiative. "When the question of the figure of the earth came to be debated," wrote our late Astronomer-Royal, Sir George Biddell Airy, "two celebrated expeditions were made under the auspices of the French Government. I believe that in matters of science, as stated by Guizot, France has been the great pioneer." And this eminent authority adds further on, "There is also one measure of the dimensions of the earth which is worth mentioning, on account of the extraordinary times in which it was effected. It was the great measure extending from Dunkirk in France to Barcelona in Spain, and afterwards continued to Formentara, a small island near Minorca. It is worth mentioning, because it was done in the hottest times of the French Revolution. We are accustomed to consider that time as one purely of anarchy and bloodshed; but the energetic Government of France (the Convention), though labouring under the greatest difficulties, could find opportunities for sending out an expedition for these scientific purposes, and



thus did actually, during the hottest times of the revolution complete a work to which nothing equal had been attempted in England."

Equally characteristic is the practical spirit, the utilitarian side, the persistent looking to results. Vagueness, shilly-shally, indefinite, happy-go-lucky methods are not common over the water. Here, as in most respects, Gaul and Anglo-Saxon are the antipodes of each other.

What romance runs through English life is strictly confined to courtship and marriage, to the domestic circle, the individual sphere; not a vestige of the poetic or ideal informing the atmosphere of politics.

The French fireside, on the contrary, is strictly prosaic, wedlock being a partnership primarily arranged with deference to worldly circumstances. But remote from daily surroundings, in the arena of public life, when called upon to deal with ideas rather than with facts, a Frenchman can be the most generously romantic, the most magnanimously chivalrous Utopian imaginable.

A Frenchman will think fifty, nay, five hundred times, before marrying for love, when marrying for love would involve impoverished circumstances, loss of position, the future of his children hazarded; without so much as a second thought, like the misguided hero of the Commune, he will rush to the barricade and confront ignominy and death on behalf of the disinherited, of some new Atlantis in which he entirely believes.\*

If I were asked to crystallize the foregoing conclusions to focus in a sentence my experience of French character, I should say that, intellectually and socially, here civilization has reached its highest expression. I will end these pages with a simile.

As I have already insisted upon, "the fickle Gaul," "the light-minded Frenchman," "our volatile neighbours,"

\* See in "La Commune," by the brothers Margueritte, Rossel's noble words on the eve of his execution.



possess a genius for friendship. Serviceable, sincere, perennial, French friendship reminds me of that beautiful element recently discovered by two native scientists. Proof against time, vicissitude, and extraneous influences, what French friendship has once been it remains throughout life, like radium, immutable among mutable things, shining with undiminished ray till the end.

## FICTION AND FIRESIDES

“DO Frenchmen ever work?” once a clever English friend asked me. “According to novels, the only occupation of men over the water is to run after other men’s wives”!

French writers of fiction stand as culprits at the bar. So gravely have they sinned against truth and the fitness of things that the average novel must be accepted as a travesty, no more resembling French domestic life than the traditional caricature of John Bull by our neighbours resembles the typical Englishman. Were middle-class homes, indeed, of a piece with certain portraitures, the words “family” and “fireside” were mere figures of speech and *simulacra* over the water.

The misconceptions created by so-called realistic novels are almost ineradicable. In an enthusiastic work on French expansion by a naturalized Frenchman, the writer implores his literary brethren to weigh their responsibilities. “Frenchmen,” he writes, “ought to set their faces uncompromisingly against turpitudes so antagonistic to national influence” (“L’Expansion Française,” par M. Novikoff: Paris).

On this subject, a writer I have before quoted observed thirty years ago, “Without doubt the world described by M. Flaubert (in ‘Madame Bovary’) exists, but is it the whole world? And if a novelist confines himself to holes and corners of society, as a delineator of society, can he

be called truthful?" Elsewhere he wrote of Paul Féval's once famous "Fanny," "This aversion to the truth among my friends and associates alarms and afflicts me."

What would Philarète Chasles have thought of "L'Héritier" by Guy de Maupassant, Flaubert's most celebrated disciple? In so far as style, composition, and, up to a certain point, characterization go, the story is a masterpiece. It would be difficult to find more exquisite pictures of suburban Paris, or more finely turned impressions of atmosphere. The writer's skill is to be deplored, since the incident on which the plot turns is not only nauseous in the extreme, but grotesque in its exaggeration of complacent immorality.

And what would the same critic have said to Daudet's "L'Immortel"? Here we find ourselves in a very different social sphere to those described in "Madame Bovary" and "L'Héritier." The immorality is here of still deeper dye.

Madame Astier is the wife of an Immortel, *i.e.* a member of the French Academy, the highest honour to which a literary man can aspire. We are asked to believe that this woman could stint the family board of necessities, lie, plot, and deceive her husband, even stoop to vice, for the sake of a dissolute son.

In novels of later date we find a disregard, not only of morality, but of seemliness that is positively appalling.

Take, by way of example, two stories that appeared two or three years ago—"Une âme obscure" and "Le journal d'une femme de chambre." Well may stay-at-home readers ask themselves the question, Does the word "home," as we understand it, really exist in France? Yet both these loathesome works have found admiring critics. It was on the strength of a review in a Paris newspaper that I ordered the first, and the second was lauded to the skies in an English review.

There is also another point to be considered. No

wave of Puritanism has ever swept over French life and literature. As a contemporary philosopher writes, "France missed her Reformation, and the consequences are felt to this day" (M. Coste, "Sociologie Objective"). Clarifying, refining influences must come from other sources.

It is hardly necessary to say that such works are not found upon drawing-room tables on the other side of the channel. In the case of young daughters, maternal censorship is rigid, the Russian blacking-out system not more so. Objectionable fiction finds its public among "young men about town," rich ne'er-do-wells, idlers generally, and among old and pious ladies, who, having led immaculate and somewhat prosy existences, are anxious to know disreputable folks and their ways from hearsay. The native patronage of such novels would not, however, suffice to keep their authors going. As M. Novikoff explains in the volume before mentioned, French fiction of this kind sells much more largely beyond the frontier than on French soil. Russia is by far the best customer of the so-called realistic novelist, Germany and England following suit. Any one who has lived among our neighbours must have come to this conclusion unaided by statistics. Thrifty folks will think twice before spending three francs and a half on a book to be thrown away when read. If occasionally middle-class Darbies and Joans do purchase a volume only mentionable among their contemporaries, they will thus indulge themselves out of sheer curiosity, and enjoy a new sensation.

Vice and crime have, of course, their thickly populated walks in France as elsewhere. The sanctity of home is guarded jealously as the gates of Paradise by flaming brand. Not wider apart the fragrant valley of Roenabed and the ebon halls of Eblis in Beckford's wonderful tale, than French family life and Bohemia, whether gilded or tatterdemalion.

It is characteristic of the French mind to seek

vicarious emotion, and enjoy what is called *les sublimes horreurs* ("sublime horrors"). Here we have an explanation of other proclivities, among these the enthusiasm for Sarah Bernhardt's most harrowing *rôles*.

I well remember, when in Algeria many years ago, visiting with a friend an old lady just upon ninety. As she sunned herself in the garden, she had on her lap perhaps the "creepiest" book—as boys would say—ever written, "*Les derniers jours d'un Condamné*."

"Not very lively reading that," observed my companion ; the other replying—

"Mais quel récit saisissant !" ("But what an enthralling narrative!").

But the existence of such novels as "*Une âme obscure*," and "*Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*" requires further elucidation. Why should capable, above all reputed, writers fix upon themes alike in subject and treatment so grotesquely untrue to life and so repellent ?

The plain truth of the matter is, that average existence, especially middle-class existence, in France is too uneventful, too eminently respectable, for sensational or dramatic handling. In support of this theory let me instance two contemporary writers, both to the fore in literary ranks.

M. Hanotaux lately published a delightful volume of sketches not quite felicitously titled "*L'énergie Française*." In one exquisitely worded chapter he sketches daily routine in an ancient cathedral city. Monotonous as was the domestic round of "*Cranford*" and "*Our village*," it must be set down as "a giddy round of vain delights" compared with that of Laon.

All who have lived in French country towns and villages realize the veracity of the picture. So slowly the clock often moves, so unbroken is the sameness of week after week, that a catastrophe, the unforeseen, seem positively banished from French soil. Take another



picture of everyday life from the pen of that usually incisive writer, Édouard Rod.

Minded to produce a story after the English model, that is to say, one that should be irreproachable, M. Rod gives us "Mademoiselle Annette," which can no more be compared in interest and vivacity to the "Small House at Allington," or "The Chronicles of Carlingford," than Daudet's "Jack" can be compared to the "David Copperfield" of his great forerunner and model.

Prosiest of prosy stories, in truth, is "Mademoiselle Annette," not a touch of romance, humour, or moving pathos enlivening its pages. Only the genius of a Balzac could have made such dry bones to live. The theme of "Eugénie Grandet" is hardly more exciting, yet that story is one of undying interest. Balzac stands absolutely alone as an exponent of bourgeois life, and vile although are many types, others are of singular beauty and elevation—the village priest in the "Curé du Village," the charming wife of César Birotteau, Docteur Benassis, and many others.

Society is so constituted in France that the novelist is thus forced back upon the exceptional and far-fetched, the annals of vice and crime. Nowadays readers require a different sensationalism in literature to that furnished by their predecessors Eugène, Sue, and Dumas. And as French firesides are the reverse of sensational, popular writers look for inspiration elsewhere.

Whilst being in no sense an apology for the bad novel, such a fact may be accepted as, at least, partly explanative. We must remember that there are no romantic marriages in France, very little that falls under the head of love-making, and nothing whatever that answers to German *schwärmerei*, an intensive expression of our own sentimentality. To be *fantasque*, that is to say, to have romantic, unconventional notions, is a term of severe reproach; woe be to that Frenchwoman who incurs it.

Tradition, bringing up, material interests, are all opposed to the freedom which renders English girlhood a prolific theme for the novelist. No well-bred French girl ever enjoys an innocent flirtation, much more a harmless escapade. Nor must she relish them on paper till she has entered into the partnership of marriage.

Again, the domestic circle in France is essentially that, and very rarely anything more. The vast majority of middle-class folks spend their entire lives within such circumscribed limits, in no wise affected by extraneous influences. The same may be said of vast numbers with us; but English people, no matter their rank or condition, move about more freely than our neighbours, and even those of moderate means at some time or other travel abroad. Very few English families are without Indian or colonial branches, an element considerably adding to the movement and interest of daily life.

The material of fiction in the two countries is, however, chiefly affected by social usages and ideals. The French domestic story must perforce become a *roman pour jeunes filles*, a story for girls. Goody-goody such tales never are; they are often well written, and deserve the name of literature. The tragedy of life, the profound springs of action, are never therein touched upon.

When I look back upon twenty-five years' experience of French domestic life, I can only recall two incidents which a novelist could have turned to good account. The first was an affair involving family honour and good repute, several households being brought low by the malversations of one member. The second was a case of mistaken identity that very nearly proved as tragic. A young man, the son of friends, was charged with robbery and murder, and although the accusation was disproved a few hours later, the shock almost killed his father.

Both circumstances lent themselves admirably to

dramatic treatment ; and more than once have I said to myself, if only a novelist had the slightest chance of being true to foreign life, here were abundant materials for my pen. Quieter themes have also tempted me from time to time. But no matter how well we may know our neighbours, English stories of French life are doomed to failure !

One novelette coming under this category affords a striking instance in point. An English writer had set himself the somewhat difficult task of describing a clerical interior, the home of a village priest. Two egregious incongruities marked the attempt.

Here was a country *curé* listening in the evening to Beethoven's Sonatas played by a young niece !

Now, in the first place, you might search France through without finding a piano in a rustic *presbytère* ; in the second, you would as vainly seek a village priest appreciative of German classic music ; and, thirdly, the notion of a young girl keeping house for a bachelor uncle, above all, an ecclesiastic, is in the highest degree preposterous.

French writers, when dealing with English contemporary life, are at a still greater disadvantage, so little hitherto have our neighbours cared to live amongst us. Picturesque effects, happy approximations, may be achieved on both sides. But the inmost heart of a people, inherited characteristics, national temperament, how unreachable must these ever be by an outsider !

In one class of the modern French novel a certain licence is admissible, even obligatory. I allude to the latest development of fiction in France, the novel with a purpose.

In his famous Rougon-Macquart series, Zola, from the reader's point of view, set a somewhat disconcerting example. Didactic novels are no longer entities, but part of a cycle. Thus a story called "Bonnes Mères" (ironical

for "over-fond mothers") was announced as the second of nine volumes, all having a distinct moral and intellectual affinity! The story brings out in scenes alternately diverting and sordid, the exaggerated views of certain French parents concerning the marriage of their children, and the theories still upheld by clauses of the Code Civil. In "Bonnes Mères," all our sympathy is with the hero and heroine, commonplace, amiable young people, as anxious as possible to fall in love with each other after being duly married by their respective mothers, aided by two *marieuses*, or matchmakers. The two latter, mercenary old ladies, are represented as having the run of fashionable society, and receiving handsome sums for their matchmaking services. The unfortunate young couple soon discover that, far from escaping maternal control, wedlock has placed them under tutelage more galling. The author pleads for a revision of the Code Civil, and more individuality in the home.

"La Source Fatale" ("The fatal source"), by A. Couvreur, is the third of a series devoted to social questions. The author's purpose is set forth in his preface, namely, to expose "the alcoholic scourge that crowds our prisons, hospitals, and lunatic asylums, that demoralizes the race, physically, morally, and mentally."

We have here the powerful picture of a promising and happy life wrecked by absinthe-drinking. M. Couvreur sets to work scientifically and philosophically. His hero's downhill career is followed stage by stage with unsparing detail and accurate diagnosis. The once healthful, wholesome-minded, self-controlled gentleman gradually sinks into sensual excess, sottishness, and mania, his last frenzied act being to fire the distillery of which he was formerly secretary.

But novels with a purpose in France, as with ourselves, deal with the abnormal, and are no reflex of average character and careers.

As I have already averred, French home life is unsuitable for romance. Domestic existence flows evenly as the streams beautifying native landscape, all kinds of sweet and pleasant objects reflected in their waves, but one mile very much resembling another, from source to outflow little in the way of diversity or surprise.



## THE CODE CIVIL AND FAMILY LIFE

BALZAC'S familiarity with the Code Civil is conspicuous in many of his works. Since the great psychologist wrote, however, domestic legislation in France has been considerably modified.

"Eugénie Grandet" affords an excellent example of the first statement. In that "great little novel," an epithet applied by Balzac to another of his *chefs d'œuvre*, we find the miser of Saumur in despair, not because he has lost his wife, but because he thereby had forfeited control of her property. By dint of cajoleries and mean artifices, he induces the love-lorn Eugénie to renounce her heirship in his favour.

When Balzac made *cette grande petite histoire* out of the merest nothings, and until a few years ago, husbands and wives were in no sense inheritors of each other's fortune. A man dying intestate, his widow, whether dowered or portionless, whether the mother of children or childless, was not by law entitled to a penny or so much as a stick of furniture. The very body of the defunct could not be buried in accordance with her wishes.\* In fact, from the moment that the breath was out of his nostrils, she became a stranger in her husband's house. Only in the case of non-existent blood relation, no matter how remote the kinship, could a widow claim her late husband's substance,

\* The Michelet law-suit, that made a great stir some years ago, is an illustration in point.

second and even third cousins being enriched to her entire exclusion. The same rule applied to a widower. Hence the *père Grandet's* dilemma. With dismay approaching to frenzy, he saw the usufruct of his wife's portion passing into other hands, those of their own daughter! It was not until 1891 that a new law entitled the survivor of an intestate partner to the fourth or half, according to circumstances, of his or her income, such life-interest being annulled by re-marriage, and not holding good in the case of divorced persons or of those judicially separated. In some measure the legal one-sidedness of former days could be remedied by the marriage contract. Thus, a man about to marry a portionless bride, a most unusual occurrence in France, might, in accordance with the *régime* called *la communauté de bien*, or participation of means, endow his wife with a part of his property, that part accruing to her at his death. But it was not by virtue of heirship that she obtained such a share. She merely became full possessor of property which had always been her own, and of which her husband had been the usufructuary.

I once stayed in Brittany with a lady who had not long before lost her husband, a doctor of some note; from time outstanding bills were paid, the half going to his children by a former marriage, the other half, down to a centime, accruing to my hostess. Both systems of contract were in full force before the Revolution, and rural archives contain many such marriage deeds, particulars of property on either side being minuted with what appears to us whimsical exactness.

"Eugénie Grandet" illustrates other articles of the Code, these, strange to say, still in force.

Although a propertied woman, Madame Grandet is described as never having a penny to call her own. Miserly instinct and habits of petty tyranny were here backed up by the law. The usurer was strictly within his right, and to-day, as when Balzac wrote three-quarters of a century

ago, French husbands enjoy the control of their wives' income. If Frenchwomen in the spirit exercise "all the rule, one empire," in the letter they remain under marital tutelage, the Roman *patria potestas*.

"A married Frenchwoman never enjoys her fortune till she dies," once observed an old French lady to me—"that is to say, she cannot touch a fraction without her husband's consent ; but if childless, unfortunately my own case, she can will it as she pleases."

"We cannot buy a silk dress with our own money till we first get our husband's leave," another friend said to me only the other day. Of course, in most cases the defects of such legislation are remedied by character and the fitness of things.

Frenchwomen are naturally very authoritative, Frenchmen are naturally very amiable, and in the highest degree amenable to feminine influence. When the household purse is too tightly gripped, it is most often in the interests of children, and not from motives of sheer avarice. And we must ever bear in mind one fact. The ancient Gaul feared only the fall of the heavens : the modern Frenchman trembles only before an empty purse ! On the legal aspect of this subject a friend writes to me :—

"You will ask how comes it about that our code has proclaimed (*édicte*) what is called the incapacity of married women ? Here are the reasons furnished by commentators of the Code.

"Legislators consider that in wedlock, as in every other well-organized association, an undivided seat of authority can alone prevent confusion and discord. Such undivided authority the law has naturally placed in the hands of the husband. At the same time, abuse of authority in financial matters has been carefully guarded against. Thus, a propertied wife with cause to complain of her husband's stewardship can obtain judicial separation."

A few years ago a bill was laid before the Chamber in

purport answering to the Married Woman's Property Act of Victorian legislation—that is to say, an Act securing to married women the absolute control of their own earnings. The project has not yet become law, and is thus commented upon by the correspondent just cited—

“In my own opinion, the bill you mention, referred to by M. Rambaud in his ‘History of French Civilization,’ has slender chance of being voted. Should it take effect, an unscrupulous wife would be at liberty to appropriate her entire earnings, spending upon herself what ought to be contributed to the family budget,” (*la communauté*).

There is a good deal to be said for this view of the case. I suppose few instances occur in England of a married couple entering domestic service, their child or children being put out to nurse. In France the custom is universal. Not only is the household work of Parisian and provincial hotels very generally shared by man and wife, but in private families a husband will often be employed as butler, coachman, or *valet de chambre*, his wife acting as cook or madame's maid. Both naturally look forward to setting up a home sooner or later; both should naturally economize for the purpose. But up to a certain point the Code Civil compels economy, and forces parents to make sacrifices on behalf of their children.

Here let me explain that interesting law called *la dette alimentaire*, or material obligation, to which we have no equivalent in England. Specified by Articles 205, 206, and 207 of the Code Civil, the *dette alimentaire* not only renders parents responsible for the shelter, food, and clothing of their children, but proclaims the charge reciprocal. And as sons and daughters entering another family on marriage are considered members of that family, they are similarly answerable. Sons and daughters-in-law must pay the *dette alimentaire* either in money or kind to a widowed mother-in-law, her second marriage relieving them of the burden. A burden without doubt it is sometimes felt, and in one of



Guy de Maupassant's most revolting stories he brings out this aspect. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the mutual obligation immensely strengthens family ties, and at the same time adds to the dignity of humble life. What Frenchman capable of earning wages would willingly see his parents dependent upon charity?

Again, the *dette alimentaire* is equally binding on parents of illegitimate children. Alike father and mother are compelled by law to feed, clothe, and shelter their offspring.

The *dette d'éducation* concerns itself with parental duties only. The State provides the best possible education for every child born upon French soil, but on parents is laid the charge of profiting by such opportunities, and of adding moral and physical training.

Recent emendations of the Code have considerably modified those sections dealing with women. Thus, a law passed in 1895 enables a married woman to open a separate savings-bank account, and to withdraw any sums so put by, provided the husband offers no opposition, such opposition being rendered all but ineffective by clauses that follow.

By virtue of an anterior law (1886), a wife can ensure a small annuity for old age, the instalments placed from time to time requiring no marital authorization. It will be seen that a marked tendency of recent legislation has been its favourableness towards the sex. I have elsewhere mentioned the important right recently conferred upon tradesmen, that of electing delegates to the Chambers of Commerce.

Classified by the Code with minors and idiots, it was not till 1897 that a French woman could witness a deed. To-day she enjoys privileges for which her English sisters sigh in vain.

By an Act of 1900, women in France were admitted to the bar.



Another and equally recent law may perhaps have been suggested by English precedent. By an Act of December, 1900, heads of business houses employing female assistants were compelled to supply precisely as many seats as the number of the employed. Formerly, as here, young women were on their feet all day long, to the deterioration of health and physique.

I will now say a few words upon the enforced division of property. I do not suppose that many readers will agree with an old friend of mine, a Burgundian of the old school. Some years ago we had been warmly discussing the contrasted systems, English freedom of testacy and the restrictive measures of France.

"No," he said, shaking his head; "nothing you say will ever convince me that it is right to will away property from one's flesh and blood. And," he added, with an air of entire conviction, "one thing I am sure of—the knowledge that young people must inherit their parents' fortune, and probably that of uncles and aunts also, makes them more affectionate."

Certainly a quite opposite impression is gained from Balzac's great series; nor do Maupassant and later writers force such an opinion upon the mind. Most French folks, I fancy, would agree with my nepotious *gentilhomme*. Anyhow, they would probably endorse the obligation of enriching, not only sons and daughters to the exclusion of every other claim, but also nephews and nieces.

I well remember an instance in point. An acquaintance of many years' standing, for whom I entertained great respect, the manager of a large Paris hotel, was seized with mortal sickness, a slow but fatal malady rendering him quite unfit for the bodily and mental wear and tear of such a position.

"Why *do* you not give up and rest, dear Monsieur R——?" I ventured to say one day. "You have no wife

or children depending on you, *cher monsieur*. Why work so hard when ill and unfit for anything?"

"I have nephews and nieces," was the reply.

There, then, was a rich man battling with pain and lassitude in order that young men and women, well able to earn their own living, should be enriched.

A few words about enforced testamentation will not here be inappropriate.

Like the daughters of Zelophehad, French girls inherit the paternal patrimony. If the Code Civil treats the sex as irresponsible beings, the strictest justice is dealt out to them with regard to material exigencies. Share and share alike is the excellent rule laid down by French legists. But parents are by no means prohibited from befriending philanthropic or other causes. A certain testamentary latitude is allowed to both father and mother.

Thus, whilst the father of an only child, whether son or daughter, cannot deprive that child of the half of his fortune, the other half he can bequeath as he will. If there are two children, each is entitled to a third of the paternal estate, the remainder being at the testator's disposal. The same rules apply to a propertied mother.

To children, French law has ever shown tenderness. Thus, children born out of wedlock are naturalized by the subsequent marriage of parents, and recent legislation (March, 1896) has favoured them in the matter of property. Anteriorally, provided that an illegitimate child had been legally acknowledged by either parent, the law awarded him a third of what would have been his portion but for the bar sinister. By a recent law this share is now the half of what would accrue to a legitimate son or daughter, two-thirds if no brothers or sisters exist born in wedlock, and the entire parental fortune falls to him in case of no direct descendants remaining.

A wonderful study is that Gallo-Roman Codex!

Like the world-encircling serpent of Scandinavian

mythology, the Code Civil, with bands of triple brass, with a drastic *noli me tangere*, binds family life into a compact, indissoluble whole, renders unassailable, impregnable, that sacred ark, that palladium of national strength, healthfulness, and vitality, the ancestral, the patriarchal home !

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### NEW YEAR'S ETIQUETTE

OUTSIDE royal and official circles, etiquette sits lightly on English shoulders. Christmas boxes to children, servants, and postmen are certainly regarded in the light of an obligation. Here what may be called domestic subjection to the calendar begins and ends. We may notice or pass over the New Year as we will. In France, it is otherwise. New Year's etiquette is surely the heaviest untaxed burden ever laid upon the shoulders of a civilized people. From the Elysée down to the *mansarde*, from the President of the Republic down to the dustman, every successive First of January is memorialized with almost religious ceremonial. The Protocol is not more rigidly followed, the Code Civil itself is not more precise, than French etiquette of the New Year. It is then that the bureaucratic and military world respectfully salute their chiefs ; it is then that family bonds are re-knit in closest union ; it is then that our neighbours bring out their visiting lists and balance the debit and credit of social intercourse. With ourselves the dropping of an acquaintance is a ticklish and disagreeable business. They manage these things better over the water. Not to receive a New Year's call, or, if distance prevents, a visiting card, is the indisputable, the recognized indication that sender and addressee are henceforth to be strangers.

French etiquette of the New Year may be divided under three heads, that of *étrennes*, or gifts ; secondly,

visits ; thirdly, cards. The first is obligatory in the case of friends and acquaintances as well as relations and subordinates, and requires considerable thought. Custom has pretty well settled the question of gifts in money to *concierge*, or portress, postmen, telegraph-boy, tradesmen's assistants, and domestic servants. Thus the modest householder occupying a tiny flat and eking out an income of three or four thousand francs (£120 to £160) yearly, must reckon upon a minimum outlay of a hundred francs (£4) on New Year's Day, larger incomes being proportionately mulcted. Heads of business houses pay away large sums in gifts of money. A young lady, the experienced manageress of a large establishment, lately told me that the New Year's gifts from her employer had often been several hundred francs. As for her part, she was in the habit of giving twenty francs to one relation, ten to another, and so on, besides making presents to friends and liberally tipping underlings, she could hardly have been richer for the largesse. We are in the habit of considering our neighbours as a thrifty, even parsimonious people. On the contrary, New Year's expenditure proves them to be the most lavish in the world.

The settling of accounts with house porters, telegraph messengers, and one's household is easy. Precedent and means regulate the scale of liberality. Much more onerous is the selection of purchases, especially those to be offered outside the family circle. Here etiquette is rigorously explicit, the rules for receiving being as strictly laid down as those for giving. To persons occupying a decidedly superior rank, nothing must arrive on the occasion of the New Year, but game, flowers, or fruit are permissible later on. A man in the habit of dining at a friend's house may offer his hostess flowers and her children bonbons, the classic tribute. Only relations and intimate friends are privileged to present folks with anything useful ; trinkets, plate, furniture, or even millinery. Thus, one lady may



say to another, "Do help me out of a dilemma. I wish to send you a souvenir, but have not the least idea of what it should be. Mention something that you would find really useful." This rule is admirably practical, and might very well be carried out here.

When a New Year's gift is presented by the donor in person, it is the height of bad taste to lay aside the packet unopened. The offering must be looked at, admired, and, whether acceptable or no, rapturously acknowledged, so at least says a leading authority on the subject. And, adds the writer, the giver of a modest present should receive warmer thanks than those who have sent us something really magnificent. The former may be ashamed of his offering, the latter is well aware that he has given liberal money's worth.

We next come to visits, and here if possible etiquette is more stringent, more complicated than with regard to *étrennes*.

In observing French manners and customs, we must ever bear in mind that family feeling, like the mainspring of a clock, regulates every movement of the social body. When our great brother poets wrote—

"The name of Friend is more than family  
Or all the world beside,"

they uttered a sentiment that might be applicable in classic Rhodes, but could have no appropriateness on the New Year's Day to France. Here is a nice indication of this supremacy, the predominance of family feeling over every other. New Year's visits to parents and grandparents are paid on the last day of the old year. By such anticipation filial respect and affection are emphasized. *Le jour de l'an* indeed belongs to the home circle. Outside the official world ceremonial visits are relegated to a later day of the week or even month. "A visit on New Year's Day," writes another authority, "is only admissible officially

among those persons nearly related to each other, or who are on terms of closest intimacy—in a word, who can exchange heartfelt effusions, conventional commonplaces being inappropriate.

The family New Year's dinner is a custom still very generally kept up, one or two intimate friends being also invited. Even during periods of mourning, when every other social reunion is out of the question, these dinners will take place, under such circumstances being melancholy enough. Unlike our own Christmas dinners, there is no statutory bill of fare. It is quite otherwise with the midnight supper of the Réveillon, or Watch Night, when a turkey stuffed with truffles or chestnuts, black pudding, fritters, and champagne are always forthcoming, and with Twelfth Day and its cake. The children's festival may be celebrated any day before February, whilst private persons may also pay their New Year's visits, so-called, throughout January, the official world is bound to strictest etiquette. From the highest functionary of the State to the lowest, alike civilians and soldiers must personally visit superiors on New Year's Day. Then, with many a secret objurgation, we may be sure, hard-worked, over-tired officers have to don full military dress, order a carriage and drive to the Elysée and the Ministry of War. I say with many secret objurgations, because French officers, as a rule, do not care to wear uniform except when absolutely obliged, the ordinary attire of a gentleman being so much more comfortable. Then the modestly paid village schoolmaster screws out money for a pair of light kid gloves, and spick and span presents himself at Préfecture or Mairie. And then lady principals of lycées for girls have to sit in solemn state whilst parents and guardians pay grateful homage. Those poor lady principals! I well remember a New Year's afternoon spent with my friend, Mlle. B——, *directrice* of a public girls' school at Nantes. For

hours they streamed in, grandparents, fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, all gracefully going through the arduous duty, a duty by no means to be shirked on either side. But habit is everything. Neither Mlle. B—— nor her sisters, we may be sure, resented the obligation. From end to end of France the same kind of ceremonial was taking place, every member of the administrative body, like mediæval feudatories doing homage to his chief, in the official as in the domestic circle, bonds being thus tightened, fresh seals set upon mutual interdependence. As a stone thrown into water sends out wider and wider ripples, so the Presidential reception is the signal for similar manifestations throughout French dominions, New Year's Day and its observance symbolizing and strengthening patriotism and devotion to the Republic.

We now come to visiting cards, a most important subject. The etiquette of the visiting card, indeed, demands a paper to itself. We will, however, strictly confine ourselves to its use on New Year's Day, or, more properly speaking, during the first two or three weeks of the year.

The exchange of these missives is at this time imperative, not only among official ranks, but also among friends and acquaintances prevented by distance from making a personal call. Equally stringent are the rules concerning dispatch. Thus, as in the case of family visits, precedence indicates respect, whilst the merely social obligation may be fulfilled throughout the month of January, no such margin is allowed in the official world. Functionaries and administrative subordinates must on no account defer posting cards until December is out. Such marks of attention should be posted so as to reach their destination too soon rather than too late. And no matter how humble the position of the sender, his compliment is scrupulously returned. Omission of this duty would not only betoken ill-breeding, but want of considerateness, and in certain cases would even constitute an affront.

Remembrances in the shape of New Year's cards often take touching form. For instance, some years since I made the acquaintance of a weaver's family in a little Champagne town, and before leaving added a trifle to the *tire-lire* or money-box of the youngest child, a boy at school. He is now doing his three years' military service, and regularly sends me a New Year's card dated from the barracks ; often, indeed, those who can ill afford it indulge in printed visiting cards expressly for this use. Heterogeneous is the collection deposited in my own letter-box during the month of January, and from remotest corners they come, each bearing the legalized greeting. The French post-office is the most amiable in the world, and relaxes its rules so that folks may greet each other at small expense. Ordinarily a visiting card having writing on it, instead of passing with a halfpenny stamp, would be charged as a letter. What are called *mots impersonnels* ("impersonal words"), five in number, are allowed on the occasion of the New Year. Here are one or two examples copied from last January's budget : *Vœux bien respectueux, bons souhaits, meilleurs souhaits et amitiés, souvenirs confraternels et bons vœux*. ("Very respectful wishes, Good wishes, Best wishes and remembrances, Fraternal remembrances and good wishes.")

The visiting card transmitted by halfpenny post may to some appear an insignificant and inadequate testimony alike of respect, consideration, and affection. But it is not so. Michelet described the beauty of Frenchwomen as made up of little nothings. So the charm and stability of French life, considered from the social aspect, may be described as a sum total of small, almost infinitesimal, gracious things.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE ENTENTE CORDIALE

I TAKE it that the *entente cordiale* will resemble a prosy, middle-aged French marriage, not a scintilla of romance existing on either side, material interests being guaranteed, no loophole left for nagging, much less litigation. Stolid bridegroom and beautiful partner will jog on comfortably enough, perhaps discovering some day, after the manner of M. Jourdain, that they have been the best possible friends all their lives without knowing it!

It is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and which the Anglo-French Convention has surely brought within the range of possibility. Like naughty, ill-bred little boy and girl making faces and *nasardes* at each other across the road, for years John Bull and Madame la République seemed bent on coming to fisticuffs. By great good luck the road was not easy to cross, and now grown older and wiser, the pair at least blow kisses to each other and pass on.

So great has occasionally been the tension between England and France that even cool heads predicted a catastrophe. In a letter addressed to myself in February, 1885, and written from his home near Autun, Mr. Hamerton wrote, "I have been vexed for some time by the tendency to jealous hostility between France and England. I have thought sometimes of trying to found an Anglo-French society, the members of which should simply engage themselves to do their best on all occasions to soften the harsh feeling between the two nations. I dare



say some literary people would join such a league, Swinburne and Tennyson, for instance, and some influential politicians, like Bright, might be counted upon. Peace and war hang on such trifles, that a society such as I am imagining might possibly on some occasions have influence enough to prevent war."

And in his work, "French and English," Mr. Hamerton touched a prevailingly pessimistic note. Anything like cordial friendship between the two nations he regarded as pure chimera; we must be more than satisfied, he seemed to think, with civility and politeness. But are not civility and politeness ancillary to friendship? Might not much of the bitterness formerly characterizing Anglo-French relations be imputed to absence of these qualities? If the respective Governments have here been at fault, the same may be said of the people. Alike historians, novelists, journalists, and writers generally, on both sides of the Channel, have been guilty of flagrant indiscretion. Whenever a stage villain was wanted by one of our own story-tellers, France must supply the type. Dickens fell into the absurd habit, and, as one of his French admirers lately observed to me, the entire suppression of M. Blandois from "Little Dorrit" would in no wise injure the story, rather the reverse; whilst the picture of Mademoiselle Hortense revenging an affront by walking barefoot through a mile or two of wet grass is the one artistic blot on "Bleak House," the incident being grossly farcical, and faulty as characterization.

French novelists have followed the same course. The villain of "The Three Musketeers" must, of course, be an Englishwoman. Balzac piled up a Pelion on Ossa of Britannic vices when portraying "Miladi Dudley." Even an elegant writer like Victor Cherbuliez, when in want of an odious termagant for a story, gave her an English name. "Gyp" has made many novels the vehicle of virulent anti-English feeling.

Other writers in both countries have taken the same tone. In a work entitled "Le Colosse aux pieds d'argile," published five years since, a certain M. Jean de la Poulaine described England as a country wholly decadent, a civilization fast falling into rottenness and decay. For years, as editress of the *Nouvelle Revue*, Madame Adam preached war to the knife with England. The superfine and disguisedly sensual writer known as Pierre Loti shows his disapproval of *perfide* Albion by ignoring her very existence in a work upon India.

Counter strokes have not been wanting on this side of the Channel. A few years back appeared, from an eminent publishing firm, an abominable book entitled "France and her Republic," by a writer named Hurlbert. And most inauspiciously, it is to be hoped, for the work itself, has just appeared a posthumous medley of abuse and vituperation by the late Mr. Vandam. Of journalism it is surely unnecessary to speak. On both sides of the Channel journalistic influence has been for the most part the reverse of conciliatory. This is all the more to be regretted, as many folks, English as well as French, read their newspapers and little else.

Historians have done much more than novelists and miscellaneous writers to keep alive international prejudices. In a passage of profound wisdom our great philosopher Locke insisted on the power, indeed, one might almost say ineradicableness, of early associations. "I notice the present argument (on the association of ideas)," he said, "that those who have children, or the charge of their education, would think it worth their while diligently to watch and carefully prevent the undue connection of ideas in the minds of young people." How many well-intentioned English folks have imbibed anti-French feeling from the pages of Mrs. Markham! Until quite recently, baneful tradition has been sedulously nursed on French soil as well. In their valuable histories Michelet and Henri

Martin seem of set purpose to accentuate French grievances against England alike in the past and in modern times.

It has been left to living writers in some measure to correct these impressions. M. Rambaud, ex-minister of public instruction, has here rendered immense service. Among other things, he tells his country-people ("Histoire de la Civilization Française") of the following home-truths: "During the so-called English wars the worst evils were wrought by Frenchmen. It was Robert d'Artois and Geoffrey d'Harcourt who provoked the first invasion of Edward III. It was with an army partly made up of Gascons that the Black Prince won the battle of Poitiers; a Duke of Burgundy threw open the gates of Paris to the English, a Norman bishop and Norman judges brought about the burning of Jeanne d'Arc." And in an excellent little manual for the young, this writer, aided by the first living authority on the Revolution, M. Aulard, has re-written history in the same rigidly impartial spirit.

Here, too, judicial accounts of the Revolution are gradually supplanting the highly coloured travesties of former days. In no sense contemplated as historic retribution, the inevitable outcome of political and social corruption, the French Revolution was treated by English writers from one point of view only, that of sympathy with three or four victims. The fate of Marie Antoinette and her hapless son, regarded simply and solely as resulting from popular hatred, has served to blind generations of English readers to the other side of that great tragedy—the sufferings and wrongs, not of a handful of high-born ladies and gentlemen, but of millions, of an entire people.

Carlyle's long-drawn-out rhapsody struck a new note. Of late years the revolutionary epoch and its leaders, the makers of modern France, have been dealt with in a wholly different spirit. I need only refer to such works as Mr. A. Beesly's life of Danton and Mr. Morse Stephens'

studies in the same field. Two French writers of two generations ago wrote with knowledge and sympathy of English life and character, Philarète Chasles, who describes early years spent in England (*Mémoires*, 1874, etc.), and Prosper Mérimée, who, in a recently published volume of correspondence, rebuts the notion that Merrie England is a thing of the past and tradition. And the works of M. Max Leclerc, on English collegiate life, of M. Demolins on our systems of education generally, and of MM. Chevrillon and Fion, have been incalculably useful in modifying French views.

Philosophy, as might be expected, has generally treated England and the English people from a judicial standpoint. The works of M. Coste and other philosophic writers should be read by all interested in this subject. M. Coste ("*Sociologie Objective*," 1897), divides social evolution into five stages, the fifth embodying the highest as yet realized, perhaps as yet conceivable. England, and England alone, has reached this fifth stage, some other States, notably France and Germany, following in the same direction.

According to this writer, English civilization is characterized by individualism and a total absence of caste. The last-mentioned and dominant feature of primitive societies has vanished from England, whilst in France the reverse is the case. "It is impossible to deny," writes our author (1899), "that caste (*l'esprit de classe*) is a survival in France; at any rate, it exists in a latent condition, ready to be called forth by any outburst of popular passion. A hundred years after the great Revolution, instead of individualizing, we classify; we are constantly arraigning bodies of men instead of regarding them as entities. The Panama and Dreyfus agitation are instances in point. Incrimination has been collective. Whilst this survival remains, we cannot say that we have reached the highest stage of civilization."



At a time when anti-Protestant feeling in France had almost attained the proportion of anti-Sémitism, M. Coste did not hesitate to pen these words, before quoted by me: "France missed her reformation three hundred years ago, and is the sufferer thereby to this day." And M. Fouillée, his distinguished contemporary, following the same train of thought, writes, "We must admit that to Roman Catholicism with much good we owe great evils," adding, after some profound remarks on the attitude of the Romish Church towards certain moral questions, "It has been justly remarked that the temperance cause makes much more progress in Protestant countries, where it is essentially allied to religion" ("Psychologie du peuple Français," 1899).

The truth of the matter is, that up to the present time English and French have as little understood each other as if they dwelt on different planets.

It has often happened to me to be the first English person French country folks had ever seen.

"Do you Protestants believe in God?" once asked of me a young woman, caretaker of an Auvergnat château, the historic ruins of Polignac.

"There is a law in your country strictly prohibiting the purchase of land by the peasants, is there not?" I was once asked by a Frenchman.

And when, chatting one day with a travelling acquaintance in Burgundy, I contrasted the number of English tourists in France with the paucity of French tourists in England, she observed sharply—

"The reason is simple enough. France is a beautiful country, and England a hideous one."

Whereupon I put the question, had madame ever crossed the Channel; to which she answered somewhat contemptuously, No. England was evidently not worth seeing.

My late friend, the genial but quizzical Max O'Rell



once told me that an old Breton lady, in all seriousness, put the following question to him :—

“Tell me, M. Blouët, you who know England so well, are there any railways in that country ?”

It is strange that, whilst so little understanding us as a nation, our French neighbours should have paid us the perpetual compliment of imitation.

Anglomania, indeed, so far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was a force mightier than the will of the greatest autocrat the world has ever seen—the Sun King himself. For years Louis XIV. had thundered in vain against *coiffures à la Fontanges*, the pyramidal headdress seen in the portraits of Madame de Maintenon. In 1714, an English lady wearing her hair dressed low was introduced at Versailles. Straightway, as if by magic, the cumbersome and disfiguring superstructures fell, the king being enraged that “an English hussy” had more influence in such matters than himself.

It was more especially after the Restoration that Anglicisms, the word as well as the thing, were naturalized in France—bifteck, rosbif, turf, grog, jockey, and many others, the numbers increasing from time to time. Many of these words have been admitted by the Academy into the French vocabulary. Thus, *flanelle* from flannel, *macadam*, cottage, drain, square, meeting *inter alia* received Academic sanction in 1878. The best contemporary writers often use English words not as yet naturalized, without italics or inverted commas. Thus Cherbuliez wrote of the hall instead of *le vestibule* in one of his novels; M. Brioux makes a lady conjugate the verb *luncher* in his play *Les Remplaçantes*; flirt, croquet, garden party, five o'clock, and a variety of similar expressions are employed as if belonging to the French tongue. English names and pet names have an especial attraction for French ears. The hero of “Deux Vies,” a recent novel by the brothers Margueritte, is “Charlie,” instead of Charles.

Jack is another diminutive in high favour, whilst Jane is persistently substituted for the far prettier Jeanne. Neither political pin-pricks nor social snubs on either side have in the very least affected this amiable weakness for all things English. For years past the word *déjeuner* has gone out of fashion. No one in society would dream of calling the midday meal by that hour; and Society now takes its afternoon tea as regularly as ourselves. I even learn that certain aristocratic ladies have inaugurated a family breakfast after English fashion, the first meal of the day being taken in company, instead of in bed or in one's bedroom, the hostess dressed as with ourselves for lunch—in fact, for the day.

It was the English family breakfast-table that most charmed Rousseau when a guest here. And I should not be surprised if ere long papa, mamma, and their little family of one or two will sit down to matutinal coffee, perhaps adopting the inevitable eggs and bacon!

On both sides of the Channel, reasoning and reasonable folks have long desired the cordial Anglo-French relations now happily established by the initiative of King Edward.

So far back as 1885 a retired notary and landed proprietor of Bordeaux wrote to me, "We do not at all know your country people—a misfortune for two nations assuredly differing in natural gifts and qualities, but each worthy of each other's esteem. Placed as both are in the vanguard of progress by their free institutions, their literature, science, arts, and economic conditions, any conflict between France and England would not only prove the greatest misfortune to the two nations, but would retard the progress of civilization for centuries. I am far from apprehending such a catastrophe, but we should at all costs avoid petty and ignoble misunderstandings; above all, we should encourage to the utmost intercourse by means of associations, syndicates, international festivals, and the like. The

better we learn to know each other, the greater will become mutual esteem ; and from esteem to friendship is but a step." The writer had never visited our country, and his acquaintance with English people was limited. His views, I am convinced, have long been shared by vast numbers of Frenchmen in all ranks and of all conditions.

Politeness and civility ! If by the exercise of such habits peace can be secured in the domestic sphere, how incalculable is their influence upon international affairs ! Just as a book is misjudged if read with passion or preconceived antipathy, so much more imperative is the judicial mood in appraising the many-faceted, subtle, French character.

It is my belief that the fruits of the *entente cordiale* will be a desire for mutual sympathy and a gradually developed mood of forbearance, with the result that French and English will recognize the best in each other, their eyes not often, as hitherto, being persistently fixed on the worst. I will precede the colophon with a citation from M. Coste, a writer already cited.

"We come into the world citizens of a State we have not ourselves chosen. Family ties, education, language, tradition, customs, and early association implant in our hearts a love of country and create a passionate desire to defend and serve our fatherland. But as by degrees civilization advances and international relations become more general, an adopted country will usually be added to that of birth ; the language, literature, and arts of that land will become familiar ; ties, alike commercial and social, will be contracted. Surplus capital not needed at home will there be spent or invested. Such an adopted land should be no matter of chance, but based upon mature social considerations. Only thus can a social ideal become in a measure, reality."

To how many of us has France already become a home of adoption—choice not perhaps based upon philosophic

grounds ! But whether respectively attracted to French or English shores by business or pleasure, in quest of health or new ideas, every traveller, no matter how humble, let us hope may henceforth be regarded as a dove from the ark, waver aloft of thrice-welcome olive branch. Anticipatory of pontifical, aerial or subterrene means of transport, in another and higher sense, may these annual hosts indissolubly link the two great democracies of the West ; bridge the Channel for ever and a day !

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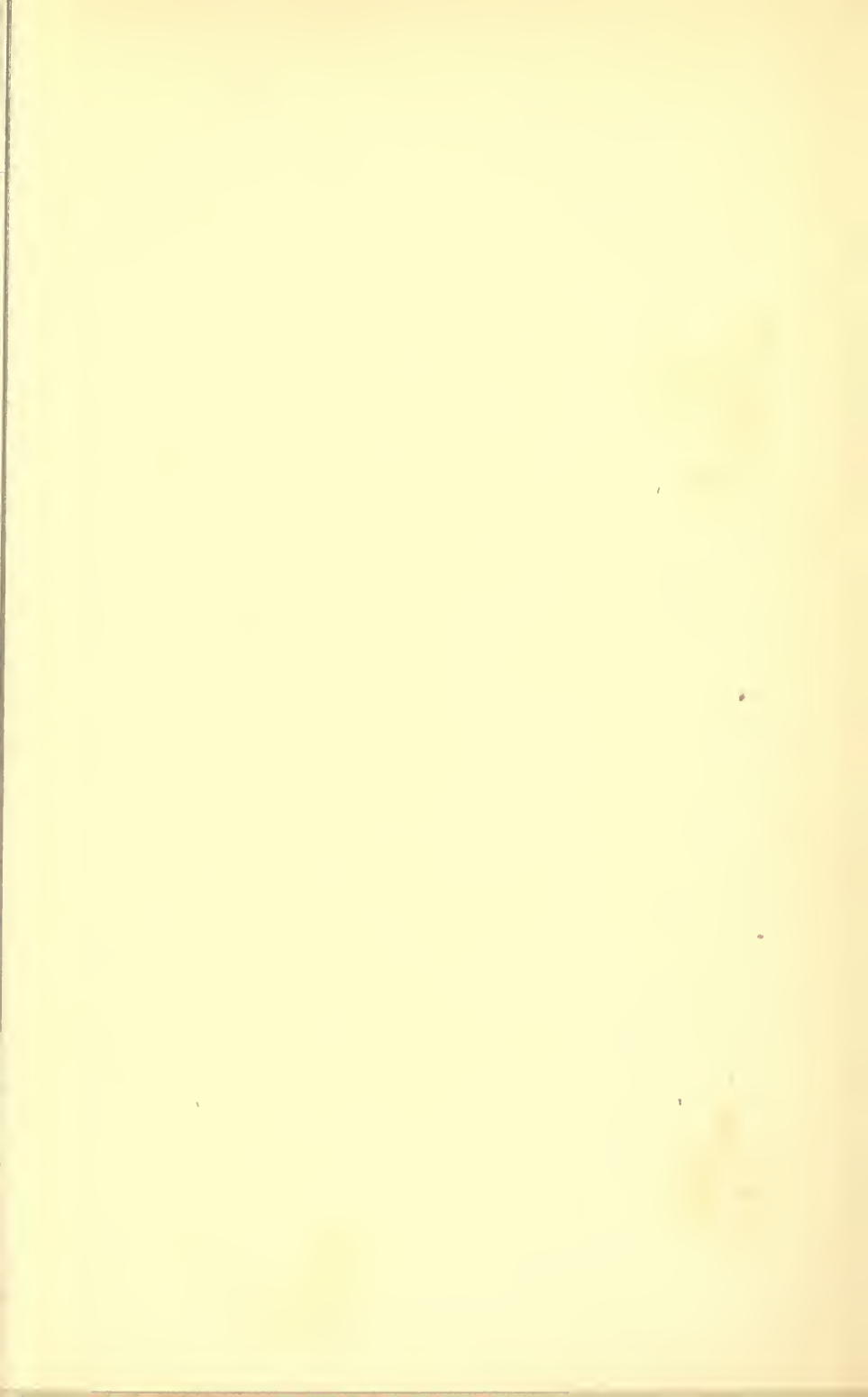
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